

JIMMY MARTIN: TOO WILD FOR THE OPRY by WAYNE WINKLER

# NOW & THEN

## THE APPALACHIAN MAGAZINE

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CENTER FOR APPALACHIAN STUDIES AND SERVICES • EAST TENNESSEE STATE UNIVERSITY

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## WILDNESS

### THE PERFECT TEN

By KAREN TRAVIS

### COLD AND SMELLIN' LIKE PICKLES

By BRITT KAUFMANN

### A TALKING CROW IN THE FAMILY TREE

By HOLLY TRINKLE



# NOW & THEN

THE APPALACHIAN MAGAZINE



*T*his year is the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Bluegrass, Old Time, and Country Music program at East Tennessee State University.

*T*he above photographs, then and now, are a testament to the living tradition of the music from the mountains.

**THEN:** From the Baumgardner Collection, Archives of Appalachia. Sarah Baumgardner, second from the left, is the only identified musician. Date unknown.

**NOW:** Sarah Needham, Karen McNees, Matt Bright, and Leona Tokatoku from the Bluegrass, Old Time, and Country Music program, 2007. Photo courtesy Jim Sledge, ETSU Photo Lab.





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## NOW & THEN

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Urbane Appalachia (Spring/Summer 2008)  
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# THE HUSK OF WILDNESS

By ROBERTA HERRIN

CENTER FOR APPALACHIAN STUDIES AND SERVICES

DIRECTOR



On a perfect Saturday morning in September, I am in Terry Hyder's potato patch by seven o'clock. It is a day to harvest. He is digging potatoes; I am gathering ground cherries. A wild delicacy, they grow late in the season on low vines, running close to the ground, hanging full of little paper-lantern sacs. Each sac starts out green and thick, but as the fruit inside matures, the lantern thins and fades to become a filigree, gray husk holding a golden "cherry." They like to grow among weeds in gardens that are on the down side of summer or along sunny roadsides or in fields after haying. A potato patch is the perfect spot.

In recent years, my neighbor Myrtle Elliott and I have pondered the scarcity of these treasures. She and my mother, Mabel, used to gather gallons of them for preserves, pies, and salads, but lately they're hard to find. So when I was meandering through the mountain fields and found ground cherries thriving in Terry Hyder's potato patch, I



hurried down the road with the news, a mile or so, to Myrtle's house.

Straightaway, Myrtle told Terry that we wanted the ground cherries, and straightaway we hit a snag: Terry needed to mow off the patch so he could dig on September 22, and the cherries weren't ripe yet. (He didn't even ask why I was trespassing.) Myrtle and I said, "Well, maybe next year." A few weeks later, I was out "meandering" again and saw the newly mowed patch. I could hardly bear to look, but then I noticed that Terry had spared the ground cherries from his scythe, leaving little islands of green vines, a great inconvenience to him, a warm gesture to us neighbor women.

At seven o'clock on the morning of September 22, the air is chilly and the sun won't hit the field for another three hours. I stoop and pick, filling an old white enamel dishpan with golden fruit in brown-gray husks. I have hardly begun when Terry arrives on his tractor, and his brother Dean and another neighbor, Jack Ingram, soon follow in their pickups. They get right to it. Terry plows out the straight rows of potatoes; Dean and Jack follow behind, raking them back into the furrow for easy pick-up. After just two rows, Terry stops the tractor and turns off the motor. We all look up to see him pointing to a fawn at the edge of the field. "It has come to check us out," he says. We are briefly still and watchful, and then we go back to work. Seeing that I can't keep ahead of the tractor, Jack helps me with the last few cherries growing in the patch, and I move to the vines on the edges of the field.

When the plowing is finished and the tractor is quiet, I can hear the conversation across the rows. The three men talk of the drought, bear season, the size of potatoes. Terry says that if you use liquid fertilizer, the big potatoes won't get hollow. He picks up a huge potato, raps it with his knuckles, and there is no hollow echo; it is solid through. Myrtle thinks the potatoes will rot if he digs them when the moon is on the full. The time to dig potatoes is when the moon is waning and old. The "signs" are in the legs. We aren't sure what that portends for digging potatoes.

My harvest is done, but before I leave I offer them my labor, and it's a serious offer—I can sack potatoes—but they refuse me. As I'm loading the full pans in the car, Dean says, "Get you a good mess of potatoes out of this row." I do. Jack suggests I might want to save some seed and plant my own little patch of ground cherries next year. "That's a good idea," I respond, but we both know I won't—and neither would he. It wouldn't be the same. The joy of finding them "in the wild" would be lost. These wild ground cherries are growing where they please, trespassing on a cultivated garden, and their wildness brought us to this moment, this gold, held in the filigree husk of Myrtle's wisdom, neighbors' generosity, the ritual digging of potatoes, the fawn, the conversation, the ephemeral bond among four people working on a little patch of earth at sunrise, and me on the edge of it all, holding tight. ♦



# EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK

By FRED SAUCEMAN

Credit for the theme of this issue goes to Dr. Robert J. "Jack" Higgs, retired English professor at East Tennessee State University, who brought wildness even to the most regimented of settings, the corridors of Bancroft Hall at the United States Naval Academy, where he operated a clandestine grilled cheese sandwich business at night, against academy regulations, to supplement his income as a Midshipman.

Many of our contributors explored wildness through stories of animals. For Jeff Kerr, wildness meant freeing a red wolf from the confines of Hooky's Gas and Animal Garden. Michael Chitwood's characters seek the meaning of a cross on a gold necklace, cut from the belly of a catfish. Michael Joslin tracks the screams of black panthers in western North Carolina. Holly Trinkle tells of a foul-mouthed crow who disrupted a service at Calvary Baptist Church in Bristol, Tennessee.

For Katey Schultz, wildness evokes powders, roots, tinctures, and Mason jars in the mountainside herbal medicine emporium of Joe Hollis in North Carolina. To Katie Fallon's characters, wildness conjured recollections of mailbox vandalism. Contemplating wildness led Wayne Winkler back to his Detroit childhood and visits from his cousin Jimmy Martin, a high-kicking bluegrass musician deemed too wild for the Grand Ole Opry.

In suggesting the theme, Dr. Higgs described a resurgence in nature writing in Appalachia: "Something almost desperate is going on in the way people are trying to latch on to what remains of nature and reminding us of what attitudes, sublime and beautiful, it can inspire. Perhaps we need a new way of looking at the mystery of nature, finding much in little, *multum in parvo*, the credo of Thoreau." ♦



# RECKONING

PERSPECTIVES ON WILDNESS

"I love the wild no less than the good."

Henry David Thoreau, *Walden*, 1854

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"Whar thar ain't enuf feed, big childer roots littil childer outen the troff, an' gobbils up thar part. Jis' so the yeath over: bishops eats elders, elders eats common peopil, they eats sich cattil es me, I eats possums, possums eats chickins, chickins swallers wums, an' wums am content to eat dus, an' the dus am the aind ove hit all."

Sut Lovingood, "Rare Ripe Garden-Seed,"  
in *Sut Lovingood's Yarns*, by George Wash-  
ington Harris, 1867

---

"Thousands of tired, nerve-shaken, over-civilized people are beginning to find out that going to the mountain is going home; that wildness is necessity; that mountain parks and reservations are useful not only as fountains of timber and irrigating rivers, but as fountains of life."

John Muir, *Our National Parks*, 1901

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"Oh he's a pestilence, and a pestilence will find you."

Dudley A. "Dud" Wash on Ernest T. Bass,  
*The Andy Griffith Show*, 1963

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"I'm a little mean, but I make up for it by bein' real healthy."

Ernest T. Bass, *The Andy Griffith Show*, 1964

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"I would like to learn, or remember, how to live. I come to Hollins Pond not so much to learn how to live as, frankly, to forget about it. That is, I don't think I can learn from a wild animal how to live in particular . . . but I might learn something of mindlessness, something of the purity of living in the physical senses and the dignity of living without bias or motive."

Annie Dillard, *Teaching a Stone to Talk*, 1988



# A TALKING CROW IN THE FAMILY TREE

By HOLLY TRINKLE



Several stories concerning a talking black crow have been circulating through my husband's family, the Trinkles, for the past forty years. These stories were compiled after conducting interviews with three different members of my husband's family: R.L. Trinkle, his father; Bernice Booher, his aunt; and Pauline Fields, his mother.

I discovered that the famous Trinkle crow was actually called by several different names. R.L. remembered him as Charlie. Bernice said Granny (Ruby) Trinkle named the crow Baby. Bernice said the children from a neighboring church thought his name was Tony. In loving memory of Granny Trinkle, I refer to the crow as Baby.

Baby's ability to talk mystifies the Trinkle family to this day. Bernice recalled, "The bird had a vocabulary that was amazing to me. I've never seen a bird that smart." She said the first time anyone recalled the crow talking was when she, Allen Cantor, Papaw Trinkle, R.L., and a lady named Peggy were getting into the car one day and heard dirty language coming from somewhere close by. The men were "ready to fight" because they thought someone was cussing them. Eventually, R.L. said they discovered the crow hiding in a bush and "talking dirty."

I discovered several possible sources for Baby's vocabulary. First, R.L. said the crow "liked loud noises" and would go down



the street to a neighbor's house, sit on the power lines, and listen to them fight. He believed the crow probably picked up the bad language from his neighbors and added that the bird "didn't know any good words." Bernice thought Baby imitated the talk of the men who hung out at her father's car garage and Carl's, a local beer joint. Finally, Pauline said the crow probably learned profanity from two of Papaw's brothers who were famous for getting drunk, cussing people, and passing out in the yard. Bernice confirmed that her uncles "got drunk and laid in the bushes."

Baby always wanted to go to Carl's with Papaw Trinkle and Allen. He would say, "Go to Carl's, get drunk, you S.O.B." Pauline believed Baby picked up this phrase from Granny Trinkle. She said Granny would get so upset at her husband when he was leaving the house to go to Carl's that she would shout, "Go on to Carl's and get drunk, you S.O.B." Moreover, R.L. remembered the crow would actually go with Papaw Trinkle and Allen to the bar and "would drink beer and get so drunk that sometimes he couldn't walk."

Getting drunk was only one of Baby's vices. Bernice remembered the crow picking up cigarettes that were on the ground. "Give me a cigarette, give me cigarette," he demanded. When given a lit cigarette, the crow would actually "puff on it."

Baby had an unusual relationship with Bernice. She and Granny Trinkle were convinced the crow did not like her. For some unknown reason, Baby would chase Bernice while saying, "I ain't agonna hurt you. I ain't agonna hurt you. Hee! Hee! Hee!" Bernice said the crow would "run with his head and body low to the ground, his head turned to

the side, and his eyes rolling around in his head" while chasing her.

One time Bernice remembered running into the house after being chased by Baby. Her grandmother didn't believe the crow was capable of premeditated behavior. Her

grandmother said, "Baby ain't gonna hurt you." Bernice responded, "That's what he says," and insisted that Baby would chase her if she went outside again. Her grandmother said, "Go on out there

and let me see." Bernice recalled that the crow "hid behind the house, waited on me to come outside, and chased me back into the house." R.L. insisted that the bird "liked loud noises" and merely "liked to hear her scream."

Bernice actually lived up the street from her parents and, for a while, kept Baby from knowing it. She would not walk home if the crow was watching. However, Baby eventually found out where Bernice lived and would harass her there.

Bernice believed the crow "had his own personality" and knew exactly what he was doing, especially when chasing her. She said, "It tickled the crow to death to see me running." She thought chasing her was all a big game to Baby but confessed, "It was really getting out of hand."

No one could ever determine why the crow chose Bernice to pick on. Pauline believed Bernice's dark hair had something to do with his dislike for her. Baby never bothered Pauline until the day she dyed her hair the same color as Bernice's. The crow "flogged" her the day she came to Granny's with her new dark hair.

R.L. told me that one day Papaw was working on a 1957 Ford in the garage. He had taken the distributor out, and the crow was sitting on top of the raised hood

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*Baby would chase Bernice  
while saying, "I ain't agonna hurt  
you. I ain't agonna hurt you.  
Hee! Hee! Hee!"*

---



of the car watching Papaw work. When Papaw turned his head, Baby dropped an object into the hole where the distributor belonged. As a result, Papaw had to take the entire motor back apart. R.L. said the fight was on and Papaw was ready to kill Baby.

Baby would also play tricks on the men in the garage by stealing their new, shiny tools. R.L. said his father "kept missing tools and couldn't figure it out." The men would blame one another. One day, someone heard a clinking noise and found Baby with his hiding place for all the missing tools. Bernice said the crow liked to take "shiny stuff," but would always replace whatever he stole with some other object like an old rusty nail or bottle cap.

Oddly, Baby liked to attend church. The Trinkles lived beside Calvary Baptist Church in Bristol, Tennessee. R.L. said the crow would "sit in the window of the church and listen to the preacher." R.L. recalled that the crow actually went inside the church one day, but "the preacher brought him home and thought it was comical."

According to Pauline, "The crow could throw his voice and mimic people." She said when Baby went to church for the first time, he started talking dirty during the service. The congregation was shocked into silence because they could not imagine who among them was behaving this way. After discovering a crow was the culprit and not one of the church members, the preacher took him home.

The last time Baby went to church was a memorable event as well. Bernice remembered Granny Trinkle telling her the crow "walked down the aisle and got up on the pulpit while the preacher preached." After the church service, the preacher took Baby to Uncle Bill and told him "the crow came to tell him good-bye because he knew it was his last sermon and Sunday at the church." Baby died on the following Tuesday. Aunt Bernice believed Baby's reason for going to church that last Sunday was "to repent for having such a bad mouth."

There were three different accounts of Baby's death. R.L. and Bernice said Granny believed Baby had choked on a biscuit. However, R.L. believed the crow "drank himself to death." Pauline said, "Someone may have poisoned the crow because they were tired of his dirty mouth."

The Trinkles realize their stories about Baby are quite unbelievable to some. When I asked my father-in-law to tell me what he remembered about the crow, he simply said, "No one will believe you." Likewise Bernice said, "We didn't think anything was great about the bird until we started telling people and they didn't believe us."

Although the Trinkles' encounters with this talking crow may seem rather bizarre, everyone insisted that the stories they shared with me really happened. My husband, Sam Trinkle, put it all into perspective: "The next time you complain about your family's heritage, just be glad you don't have a talking crow in your family tree." ♦

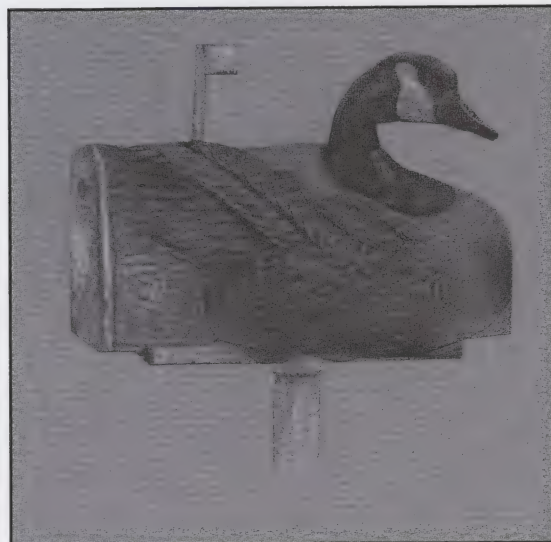
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Holly Trinkle was born in East Tennessee. She graduated from East Tennessee State University in May 2007 with a B.A. in history. She and her husband of seventeen years live in Blountville, Tennessee, and are the parents of four children.



# GOOSE

By KATIE FALLON



He keeps your picture taped to the dashboard, next to the glove box. The photo's edges curl up around you posing in a pink bikini. Inside the glove box, a butterfly knife rests under the insurance card. You know it's there, and it's thrilling. This night, brown leaves dance on the streets like marionettes, the puppeteers hidden up in the trees. The music's so loud in the car that no one can talk. You light a Marlboro and your boyfriend hands you a warm can of Coors Light. He's already got one open between his legs. Two boys in the back seat pass a pipe.

It is the night of the homecoming dance, sophomore year of high school. You've lied to your parents and you never go to the dance, though they bought you a dress. Instead, your boyfriend, whom you aren't allowed to date, picks you up at your friend's house. You, your boyfriend, and two of his

pals go driving around in his beat-up Ford Tempo. You call the car "a beat-up Ford Tempo" now, remembering it more than a decade later, but then it was sexy—five-speed standard transmission, Grateful Dead stickers, the inside warm with the smell of wintergreen Skoal and Cool Water cologne.

You leave the suburbs, go out past the cow pastures, down back roads and dirt roads and through Bear Hollow to more suburbs, housing developments, gated communities, folks who want to live in the country without really being in the country. Your boyfriend rolls down his window and whips his Coors can at a yellow deer-crossing sign. The metallic crack echoes and everyone laughs. He reaches under his seat and opens another, smiles at you, holds your hand while he downshifts.

You smile back and think about everything, of what your friends are doing, of



who's at the dance. Of your boyfriend, and how lucky you are. Of the way you get to ride in the passenger seat. Your boyfriend is not very tall, but he's a wrestler, and you like the way his veins move under his skin on top of his muscles. He has big blue eyes (brown? you can't quite remember) and sandy hair that flops across his forehead. Your friends think he's a bad influence. He thinks they're snobs. Your parents hate him. Then, you pretended not to know why. You fought them, you cried, you broke things and ran away. Now, looking back, you see exactly why and realize you knew it then, and liked it. Which might have been the reason you're riding here, in the Tempo, drinking Coors Light and smoking reds and thinking about danger and thrills and your boyfriend's tongue and teeth and hickeys and when would they pass that pipe up here?

So your boyfriend drives and music blares and you look out the window at trees and trees and the black velour night. Moon shadows rise and fall and hover in ditches. It's almost Halloween.

One of the guys in the back shouts and leans forward, slaps your boyfriend's shoulder. The car stops, he throws open the back door, jumps out, and this is when it happens—the event that sticks in your mind now, looking back, years and years later.

A mailbox. A beautiful mailbox, handmade, in the shape of a Canada goose. Wooden, painted, careful detail in the goose's markings, delicate brush strokes around the black eyes. Neatly stenciled letters march across its folded wings. What a lovely mailbox, you think, and smile. Then your boyfriend's pal grabs the goose by the neck. He yanks hard. The mailbox shakes, but stays attached to its stand. He yanks again. And again. He puts his arms around the goose's resistant body and wrests it back and forth. Sweat runs down his cheeks and he curses. He jerks the goose again and it

finally breaks free of its stand, breaks free but falls forward and connects with his forehead. He cries out, blood bursts, but he holds onto the mailbox, staggers a few steps and sets it in the middle of the road, in front of the car. Then he kicks it, caving in one side of the goose, keeps kicking, circles it, looks for weaknesses. He spits on it, stalks back to the car, smears the blood across his face with his palm.

Fuckin' thing is heavy, he says, gets in and slams the car door. Your boyfriend giggles, his other pal claps, and you stare uneasily at the goose, disappearing in the rearview mirror as the car drives away. Your boyfriend tosses his Coors can into a rose bush, picks up your hand again. You look really good tonight, he tells you. You smile, maybe even blush, and sink lower into the seat, hard beer can squeezed tightly between your thighs.

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You remember all this today, more than a decade later. You remember it in second-person point of view, probably because you feel like you're watching the events happen to someone else.

You remember that night because a few minutes ago, your mother called and told you that her mailbox had been stolen. Why would anyone steal my mailbox? she asked you. Someone must not like me. You hung up the phone and thought about everything, of your husband at work, your dog, your birdfeeders. How blue the male indigo bunting's feathers looked in the sun, the patchy red of an immature cardinal, how you need to clean pine needles out of the gutters. You thought about your ex-boyfriend's son, how he must be about eight years old, and his son's mother, smoking menthols behind the counter at Mister Donut, her permed blonde hair reeking of curdled cream. It made you uncomfortable, thinking about everything like that. It made you a little sad, too, not



because you miss your ex-boyfriend or envy his son's mother, but you wonder what happened to the people you knew, and what they're doing right now, today, back home.

But mostly, after hanging up the phone, you thought of that goose, the unprovoked aggression, the blood, your complacency. The reasons behind it all made you worry, mostly because you couldn't figure them out, and maybe you blamed yourself.

You are also bothered by a scenario you imagined for the first time that night: An aging woman, your mother perhaps, pads out to her front porch to get the newspaper, white breath puffs hanging in front of her mouth, chill morning air goose-bumping

her skin. She looks down to the end of her driveway, terry bathrobe floating around her body. She squints, but it's not there—her mailbox is gone, the beautiful handmade Canada goose mailbox her son or daughter painstakingly fashioned and painted in wood shop class. She gasps, then looks further down the road, and sees it shattered, beaten, kicked-in and collapsed in a pile. She might shriek or cry or call the police, but in your imagined scenario, she gently collects the pieces, cradles the goose's broken body, and seeing it's beyond repair, quietly slides it into a garbage can. She goes inside and calls her daughter and sighs, someone must not like me. ♦

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Katie Fallon teaches creative writing at Virginia Tech University. Her nonfiction has appeared in *Fourth Genre*, *River Teeth*, *Ecotone*, *Appalachian Heritage*, and elsewhere. She also serves on the board of directors of the West Virginia Raptor Rehabilitation Center and is obsessed with birds.

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## A School of Forestry

By HEATHER ROSS MILLER

I'm not the woman who looks at trees  
and figures board feet, twelve inches  
by twelve by one. Those tangled things  
standing up and hanging out there,  
greeny full of rain and mist,  
fragrant as the Orient,  
they have their own laws,  
sovereign, and alone,  
in a direct line with sunlight.  
I am a loved daughter,  
the consort of their keeper,  
unrestricted, boundless,  
and free.

And whether you like it,  
or not, somebody's in charge  
of this, somebody skilled  
in taking care. He asked,  
Can you live in this, seeing  
nobody but me?  
Then he sent a fox,  
a spotted butterfly,  
and two children,  
and we held on,  
and around us  
the hickories, the pines,  
stood like gods.

Heather Ross Miller has written and published many books of fiction, poetry, and nonfiction, most recently *Champeen: A Novel*, Southern Methodist University; *Crusoe's Island: The Story of a Writer and a Place*, Coastal Carolina Press; and *Gypsy with Baby: Poems*, Louisiana Literature Press. A new novel, *The Creative Writing Murders*, appeared in 2007 from Louisiana Literature Press. Her latest collection of poems is entitled *Late Love*.



# THE CONVERSATION

By STEVE KNEPPER



The sun hadn't crept over the ridgeline yet so Vernon's world was still shaded blue. Thin smoke signals spiraled up off the backyard grass and creek while songbirds chattered in the treetops. Vernon tried to syncopate the wooden rhythm of his rocker against their chiming tunes. The steaming yard was a testament to former industry with its empty fuel drums, stacks of saw horses, and overgrown arbor. The old man's hazel eyes looked past these relics, though, instead scanning the creek's far bank for a flicker of white or a shifting in the shadows, the subtle signs of a whitetail's movements. There were no visitors this morning. Vernon sat his coffee mug down on the folding tray

and pulled up his shirt sleeve to look at his watch: almost seven. It was nearly time.

*The Farmer's Almanac* had called for a warm spring and it'd been right so far. Vernon wasn't wearing his jacket, just a button-down shirt and jeans. He didn't even have shoes on. The dew off the porch boards felt good on his stocking feet. May apples already covered the forest floor and buds were thick on the trees. Last night at the VFW Chet Daugherty said that he'd even found an early mess of wild mushrooms. Vernon could remember many an early April when snow covered the ground, working days of sleet and mud, but he couldn't remember one spring like this.

*Illustration by Sara Peters.*



The turkey call rested on Vernon's knee. He kept a gumband looped between the paddle and the box to stop them from rubbing against each other. Jameson Clark had cut it out of walnut wood nearly forty years ago, etching his initials onto the bottom with a woodburner. When he gave it to Vernon he told him that it would yelp like the finest hen in the forest. He'd been right. Jameson's call had lured many an unsuspecting gobbler to Vernon over the seasons. It really wasn't too much worse for the wear, either. The wood was faded and there were a few scratches on the box, but Vernon had only needed to tighten the tiny brass screws a couple of times. Still, he'd rarely taken it to the woods in those last few years before the surgery. He didn't want to bust it up and he'd started using mouth calls most of the time anyway.

After retiring Vernon hunted turkeys nearly every day of the season. Even when Marlene got sick he still managed to slip out most mornings. He loved being in the spring woods, watching nature put on its pretty green dress. He loved talking to the turkeys. Now, though, he could only talk to them from the back porch. He knew he would never sit tucked in against an oak tree again. He needed a thick cushion just to stand the rocker.

Vernon's hands shook a little as he tried to get the gumband off. He ended up dropping it on the porch floor. He tried to pick it up with his cane but just pushed it down through a gap in the boards. Cursing softly, Vernon cradled the

bottom of the box in the palm of his left hand. Gently working the paddle back and forth, he coaxed five whining notes out of the wood. They disappeared into the spring air. Vernon stopped rocking and cocked his head. He'd heard several gobblers in the distance this year, but none really close enough to talk to. He relaxed his muscles, leaning back into the chair and tapping the top of the call paddle with his index finger. Only the songbirds and the running water answered him. He would miss those sounds too, he supposed.

The creek separating Vernon's backyard from the woods was hardly more than a run unless it rained something fierce. In a dry summer you could jump right across it a little ways downstream, not even getting your socks wet. It was too shallow for good fishing, but you could sometimes catch minnies in it to use as bait elsewhere. Vernon used to scatter shelled corn on the far bank every week. Around dark you'd turn your head away for just a moment and then look back to find three or four deer standing there, usually a doe and her fawns. He and Marlene once watched a pair of good-sized bucks, a seven-point and an eight-point, spar on the bank. He could still remember the little wooden thunderclaps echoing off the ridge when they locked antlers. Squirrels ate most of the corn, though, which always aggravated Vernon. He'd never shoot a baited deer—wasn't sporting—but he sometimes picked off squirrels from the back porch, especially when

they ate a week's worth of corn in one or two days. Marlene never liked that much. He always had to remind her that the mill wasn't giving corn out for free.

When Vernon worked on the road crews he got hold of some scrap wood from a demolished shed. He and his brother Larry used it to build a narrow bridge across the creek. Pat was just little back then, and Vernon gave him a piece of two-by-four to hammer nails into while he and Larry worked. Mary was younger yet, no more than four or five, but Marlene still sent her out with a pitcher of lemonade, paper cups, and a big grin. When Pat got older, he and Vernon would creep breathless across the bridge on November mornings, weighed down with their heavy orange hunting coats and deer rifles.

Pat worked as a welder now in McConnellsburg. It was a steady job and he made out fine when you considered the overtime hours. He lived with Jenny and the kids in a nice bungalow outside Orbisonia. Mary was divorced and lived above the post office in town. She used to come over a lot more and Pat used to visit less. Vernon figured they were both probably feeling guilty. He kept telling them he wasn't mad—and he wasn't—but they were still edgy around him.

Vernon had never even seen it coming, really. Surveyors in neon green safety vests worked up and down the back road all last October. They parked their trucks in the dirt lot at Gethsemane Baptist, spreading a bevy of tripods and



cones along the thin strip of macadam. They punctuated the gravel burm with metal stakes, but these markers soon disappeared under a thick carpet of orange and red leaves.

The township had paved the back road only ten years earlier and it still didn't have a center line. Most of the traffic came from the handful of tin-roofed houses tucked back into the woods. Teen-age boys were the back road's only other frequenters. They would bring their girls out there after movie dates or dances, backing their cars into the pull-offs so they could speed away if headlights appeared.

The letter didn't come until early December. Vernon never opened his own mail, even though he walked out to his box every morning. He just piled it on the kitchen table until Mary came over to sort through it. The thin white envelope with the seal lay unopened for nearly two weeks, sandwiched between a True Value circular and an insurance bill.

At first, Pat and Mary wanted him to fight it. Mary reread the letter three times before calling her brother at the plant. He drove over right after work and immediately started pacing back and forth across the linoleum like a bull.

"Shit fire, Dad. You sweated your ass off for them for years. They're not going to do this to you. They can't do it anyway. It's unconstitutional."

"Swearing's not going to help anything," Mary said.

"Hell, I'm going to do a whole lot more than swear. I'm going to go up to the courthouse and get some goddamned answers."

"You'd better call Matt Brown first. You need a lawyer for something like this. You can't just go around like an idiot swearing at everyone. Don't you think we should call a lawyer, Dad?"

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*He understood their reasoning,  
and he knew it was unfair for  
him to hold on, but mornings like  
this he just couldn't help it.*

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"I guess so." Vernon had been staring at his shoes, but he looked up at his son now. "Maybe you had better call Matt. Get some advice."

"Don't worry, Dad. I'll take care of it. We won't let them pull this shit on us." Pat tucked the letter into his back pocket.

"And I'll pray for this, Daddy."

When Vernon got the second letter, though, they started singing a different tune. Pat went to talk with the state lawyer several times, and Vernon knew his kids had already made a decision for him when they both got out of Mary's Plymouth in his driveway. They took turns laying out their reasons.

"Hell, Dad. This place ain't fit to live in anyway. You need a new roof. That old knob and tube wiring could catch fire any time."

"And you're too far away from both Pat and me. What if you had an emergency?"

"I imagine I'd call for an ambulance."

"You could get a nice apartment in Orbisonia. Flirt with the waitresses at the pizza shop three times a day. Bullshit down at the fire hall. It'd be the life."

"God does work in mysterious ways, Daddy. Just think of how many kids have died out on that corner. It's a death trap."

Vernon thought to himself that God offers gifts and the Devil temptations. He knew he wouldn't be around too many more years, though, and even if the state did agree to reroute, his kids would never get that much out of this place on the regular market. He understood their reasoning, and he knew it was unfair for him to hold on, but mornings like this he just couldn't help it.

He tried to push it all out of his head by taking another long drink of coffee. He didn't have any cream, so it was black and strong. The mug read "Good Neighbor's Hardware: 25 Years of Service." They gave them out last year at customer appreciation day. He could remember when they first set up shop in the old movie theater on Main Street. They gave Mary a balloon and he bought paint for this porch. He'd painted it twice since then.

He picked up the call once more and made it yelp. Silence.

Packed boxes covered one whole side of the porch. Mary took care of the bedrooms last week. Pat and Jenny came just yesterday to work on the living room. They took



down all the old photographs and prints on the walls. Vernon remembered hanging some of them one afternoon soon after he and Marlene were married. He was standing on a metal folding chair leveling the frames when she came up behind him and wrapped her arms around his legs.

Vernon stared off over the top of the ridge. Hot orange and red now backlit the topmost trees. He took a weathered paperback up off the table, *High Lonesome* by Louis L'Amour. Vernon read a lot these days. Mary got him a Bible in large print last Christmas and he'd read most of the Old Testament prophets over the winter, Ezekiel and Isaiah and Obadiah. He'd read mostly Western novels recently, though. Pat found a whole box of them at a yard sale shortly after the surgery. They'd sat in the closet until a couple of months ago, when Jenny found them again.

It took Vernon a little while to find his place because he didn't use a bookmark. He just turned the pages down at the corners. After a

couple of days with a book there got to be so many notched pages that it was hard to find the last one. This had been a good story so far. Lots of action.

Just when Vernon got a few paragraphs into the sage grass and mesas, though, an arrogant sound broke overtop of the morning's white noise. The old man froze in his rocker. He thought for a moment that he had imagined it. A few moments later, though, a second deep gobble rang out. It was low-pitched and throaty, urgent, with almost a wheeze to it. A big old tom, Vernon thought, maybe even a trophy bird. He sat up straight and the book slipped from his lap down onto the porch boards. He picked the call up off the table and gently worked the paddle. After three true notes, the bird broke Vernon off with another big gobble.

He culled knowledge from the sound. The bird was right on this side of the ridge, still on the roost. The old man pictured the gobbler sitting high in a tree like

a big chief. Its feathers catching the first rays of the morning sun. A long beard with two-inch spurs to match. Raising his voice to let all the morning know exactly where to find him. That tom was ready to face the day ahead. Vernon scanned the treetops along the ridgeline, searching for the bird's form. He couldn't find it among the budding leaves. The turkey would fly down off the roost soon, and then, if it even gobbled again, its call would be muffled somewhat by the foliage.

Vernon leaned back in the chair and slowly resumed rocking. A smile crept over his face as he slid his thumbnail over the call's worn wood. The U-Haul would be here within the hour and Pat and Jenny would start packing those boxes into it. The porch would be empty by tonight. Salvage workers would come tomorrow to get the scrap metal out of the yard. Right now, though, the songbirds were still chattering in the trees. The creek was still running through the backyard. ♦

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Steve Knepper grew up on a dairy farm in Blairs Mills, Pennsylvania. He worked at a hardware store for six years while attending Southern Huntingdon County High School and Juniata College. He currently studies and teaches at the University of Virginia. This is his first fiction publication.



# COLD AND SMELLIN' LIKE PICKLES

By BRITT KAUFMANN



A few minutes into the conversation my cell phone begins to beep at me. I know she can't hear it and I am not about to admit I called to interview Dot Jackson, a forty-year veteran investigative reporter with the *Charlotte Observer*, with a nearly dead cell phone. So I head to where my charger is plugged in—my bathroom—and continue scribbling notes.

Admitting such a gaff to a Pulitzer Prize-nominated journalist didn't seem the way to make a good impression. But she would have just laughed. She laughs about most anything, I've discovered.

It wasn't any of her journalistic achievements that had prompted me to call, though.

Rather it was her first novel, *Refuge*, published in April 2006 by Novel-lo Festival Press. (*Refuge* has since received both the 2007 Appalachian Book of the Year Award given by the Appalachian Writers Association and the Weatherford Award given by the Appalachian Studies Association.)

I had managed to get my hands on an advance copy of *Refuge* when the publisher sent it to the literary festival planning committee I was on. Charles Price held it up and asked, "Anyone want to read Dot Jackson's novel?"

"Me!" I said and nearly snatched it out of his hands before anyone else could call dibs.

*Dot Jackson. Photo by Cindy Morris.*



After all, this was Dot's one and only novel—and an advance copy. My big plan was to read a book by each festival author so I could impress them, or at least appear competent, if I ever got a chance to talk to them. I had hoped, and still do, that hobnobbing with real authors would allow me to trail in the wake of that stardust which wafts about them. Surely, some would fall on my shoulders and make me a real author, too. I envisioned a miraculous cross between Tinkerbell and the Velveteen Rabbit.

Really, it was the photo Dot's publicist sent to me for the festival website that first captivated me and made me want to read the novel. The photo must have been made in the late afternoon sun. The warm glow contrasted by slanting shadows made me want to sit on that front porch with her. I too would be smiling, every wrinkle pointing toward happiness, holding a dirty pair of gardening gloves.

When I finished the book, it was the friendly image in the photo that gave me the courage to e-mail her: "I just finished it yesterday, despite my three children (a three-year-old and one-year-old twin sons) who kept crawling on me and saying, 'All done. Book.' The story made such a strong impression on me."

I related to the main character, Mary Seneca, in an uncanny way. Since moving to the mountains from Indiana, I have realized I will never fit in—yet I am beginning to live out my heart's dreams here. Mary Sen had also never lived

in the mountains but found she belonged there. She too was educated, yet found herself up to her ears in domestic survival. In the e-mail, I lamented being a college-educated woman who spends the vast majority of her time diapering children and sweeping floors. I offered this as an excuse, as material to invoke pity so she'd consent to an interview for a piece in the local paper previewing her upcoming appearance.

Dot answered back promptly, giving me her phone number and sympathy: "When I started writing [*Refuge*] I had three kids who were about two, three, and ten; we had just gone through an awful crisis when their father went blind overnight, when he was only about thirty-two, and had to be flown away for experimental treatment. He did, thank God, regain enough sight that his life was not permanently disrupted, but it was a wake-up call to me."

I am thirty-two. I began praying for no such wake-up call.

We continued to trade e-mails and stories of our children's antics as we arranged for the phone call: Mine ate crayons and toilet paper; hers ate dog Kibbles or an extra-crispy arthropod that was just too slow for its own good.

When I finally do call to interview her, the sound of her voice makes me wish I'd driven the hours to sit on that front porch with her. She greets me like I'm an old friend, though we have only swapped a handful of e-mails. Her voice is melodious, for her choice of words and

the frankness with which she speaks them. She writes that way, too.

"Britt, darling, people ask me what my book is about and I tell them, 'It's about lust, incest, murder... and it's all very lighthearted,'" she says, then laughs. I laugh, too, because it is so preposterous that such things should be lighthearted, but I have read the book and I know she's telling the truth. She adds in an animated voice, "And everyone's dead at the end!"

It began some forty years ago when Dot's mother was "of an age that Southern ladies get when they tell everything." After swearing Dot to secrecy, she unfolded the adolescent romance of one of Dot's sophisticated and dearly loved great-aunts. She and her first cousin had fallen in love at first sight and run off together.

Dot's voice changes from rolling vowels to a terse clip, hitting the consonants hard as she continues the story: "Well, her father looked her up and dispatched the boy back to Alabama." The great-aunt never saw him again. Upon returning to Mobile, the young man and his brother promptly attempted to pirate a yacht. It didn't go their way and they were both shot and killed by the heavily-armed owner of the boat who was still on board.

Later, despite being "ruined," her great-aunt did marry and lived a contented life with a much older, wealthy man. But she never really loved again so passionately, and neither did the young man. He didn't have a chance.



In her waning years, her great-aunt told Dot of a peculiar dream she'd been having: She was running happily on the shores of some place she'd never been. Dot made the connection that the beach was in Mobile though she never let on she knew the whole story and had been writing about it. The dream made Dot understand the potent forces that can draw and bind people together—even beyond the realm of the rational and the living. Dot had discovered the foundation her novel was built on, never having realized it so fully before.

Though she had promised her mother not to whisper the family scandal to a soul, Dot knew she had a story to tell. Back in the 1960s she set about to write it, with a proper amount of disguising. She admits she had to wait for a few people to die off before she could seek publication.

Disguising the true story proved a challenge. Then Mary Sen swooped in. Dot describes her as an "entity" who said, "I know all about this. Let me tell you."

"I sound as crazy as a bedbug," Dot laughs. "Way too crazy for anything."

I assure her she's not, so she'll keep talking—which she does. "I didn't make these people up. They wanted it told," she insists. "They came as a pair. Mary Sen and Ben Aaron."

Once while covering a newspaper story in the mountains of North Carolina, the setting of most of the novel, Dot recalls feeling Mary Sen was there with her as she walked a

valley fence line. "I remember talking to her," Dot says. She can't remember what incident in the novel she was trying to get right, but she confronted Mary Sen.

"Let's get this right," Dot said to her. "What exactly did you say?" It went on like that for most of the writing process: Dot questioning and Mary Sen setting her straight.

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*Mountain folk  
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believable characters.*

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Even when she moved to a new house that was "totally haint free," Mary Sen's presence stayed with Dot. Once, in the kitchen, with all the doors and windows closed, the paper towels suddenly unrolled out into the room. Out of Dot's mouth came, "Are you there?" And they set to straightening out another scene.

"I became dependent on her," she explains. Writing the novel took fifteen years, and in that time, Dot came to know her main character quite well. But then one day, the novel was done. Mary Sen had reached the end of what she had to say. "I had to give her up," Dot says, frank as ever, but somber. "She didn't need me any more." Months later, I watch her say these very words on D.G. Martin's *Bookwatch* and see her eyes begin to fill with tears.

But back in the bathroom, I have run out of room on my note-

paper and have had to scrounge around for something else to take notes on. And our conversation is not without interruptions. At one point Dot hears the crow of triumph as my twin sons first figure out how to open the door to the back rooms of the house. I explain to her how incorrigible they are as I stretch the phone cord taut and push their chests alternately as they try to enter the bathroom in waves, waiting for my husband to come haul them off.

I still don't tell her where I'm conducting the interview. Let her think it's the office. "You'll get through it," she assures me. "You'll get through it."

Dot knows about patience. The completed manuscript called *Refuge* took its sweet time finding a house. She sent it to New York in the '70s and got less than kind remarks about some "obvious flaws": Mountain folk who were educated simply weren't believable characters.

She thinks Scribners still has a copy of *Refuge* sitting around somewhere. But even her copy of the novel was taken when her home was burglarized and every shred of anything computer-related was stolen. Computer—gone. Disks—gone. The large section edited out of the original *Refuge* intended to be the sequel—gone. Backup copies—all gone.

But years earlier when an old friend had learned that she was keeping her manuscript under her bed, he insisted that Dot hand over her only printed copy. He pre-



served it by putting it in his refrigerator. Safe from the elements and critters, it chilled there for thirteen years.

Then one day another friend, Frye Gaillard, asked her what ever happened to that manuscript she'd been working on back in the '70s. "I told him, 'It's over in Louis Henry's refrigerator.'" Gaillard, a board member of Novello Festival Press (the only publishing house owned by a public library), wanted to publish *Refuge*. After thirty years of agents and publishing mishaps, a publishing house was approaching her, and a house dedicated to the literary arts at that.

Dot says she tried to give *Refuge* away, but they insisted she have a standard contract. The manuscript went straight from the fridge to the press, "cold and smellin' like pickles," she says.

Some forty years after it was begun, there it was, in print.

Dot can hear my children squalling in the background. I notice it is almost dinnertime, so I end our conversation. She understands.

I e-mail her the next day to thank her for the interview. She replies, "I so well remember being where you are now—with little kids and way too much to do and

things you want to do so badly but When? Just hold on, and I promise! Time flies, even the best of it. Use what scraps of energy you have left and make that start—make the groove while the hopes and ideas are still sharp, and then, it will be easier to get into when life settles down."

When I do finally see Dot Jackson in the flesh, it is outside on a warm September day in the late afternoon sun—though not on any front porch. We greet with a hug, like we know each other well, and laugh. I finally confess I conducted the interview in the bathroom, which she finds entirely appropriate.

The next afternoon, her reading at the literary festival is packed. I hear much of the same story but with a storyteller's flair for variation. She still insists she is no writer and that she didn't make any of this up. "It's all true," she says, patting the book. "It happened to somebody."

Dot speaks of writing as an "obsessive disorder," confessing how she'd come home from the *Observer*, "fix something terrible for the children and hole up with this thing." I know exactly what she's talking about as I consider the amount of pretzels and goldfish crackers my children have eaten.

I blush from the front row when she calls me "this darling child" in front of everybody and thanks me for my role in the event. I sit rapt, as I hear the same story over again. I laugh when her old friend claims Dot paid her off not to tell any stories about her.

Not only is *Refuge* Dot's first novel, published when she was seventy-three, it is her last. About writing that stolen sequel, she says, "I could no more pull this thing off today than I could fly to the moon." But she tells us a bit of what would have happened in the valley after the closing chapter of *Refuge*.

At one point in the weekend, I am able to introduce her to my children, husband, and mother-in-law. Later, she e-mails to comfort me about the state of disarray my house must be in because of the time I devoted to the festival. But I confess right away that my mother-in-law has done all my laundry and left the house in better condition than I usually do.

She replies, encouraging me to take a break and relax: "Now sprinkle the breakfast Cheerios on a newspaper on the floor, and sit back with another cup of coffee."

But I take her earlier advice instead and set to writing my first novel. ♦

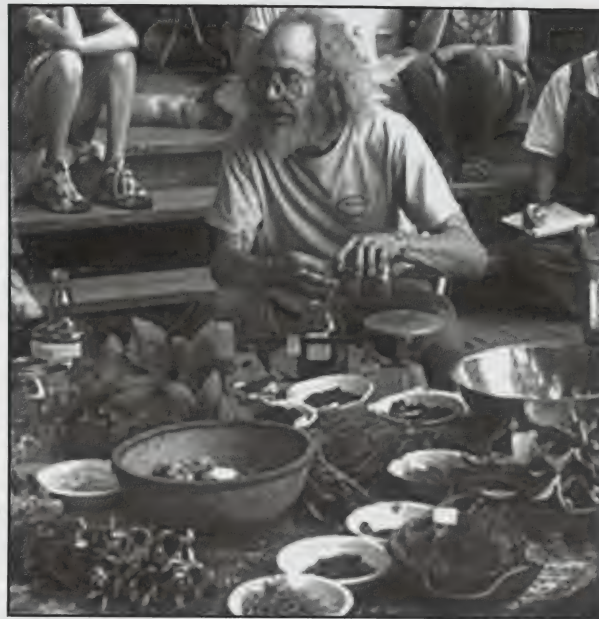
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Britt Kaufmann, thanks to the help of her husband, is a stay-at-home mom to her three children, ages five and under. She helps plan the Carolina Mountains Literary Festival in her hometown of Burnsville, North Carolina. Her work has appeared in several regional publications including *Western North Carolina Woman*, *Kakalak 2007*, *Main Street Rag*, and *The Pedestal Magazine*.



# MOUNTAINS OF TEA

By KATEY SCHULTZ



Seven miles into the South Toe Valley in Western North Carolina, cupped by some of the oldest mountains in history, little White Oak Creek tumbles down the mountain like a reckless child running through the woods. It is still only a trickle compared to its first major destination, the South Toe River, but I look for it anyway because I know it is where I need to turn my car westward up the mountain slope. The directions I have are from memory; after all, I am in my own neck of the woods, and the house I am going to is not far from my family's land. But this is a special trip.

I drive steadily up the paved road, my car squaring off with a wall of the Black Mountains, the highest mountains east of the Rockies. Past horse pastures, a small antique car collection, pudgy boys on four-wheelers, and an old cemetery, the road

turns to gravel. Fortunately, I remember this road and park my car at the bottom. Pot-holes the size of garden beds await

and have a reputation for wreckage, even without snow and even though my car has excellent clearance. I climb a quarter of a mile over frost heaves, jagged quartz, and hunks of mica until I reach Joe Hollis' Mountain Gardens, bordering the National Forest. This is where my pain has taken me.

Since my mid-twenties my body has begun aging in noticeable ways, slightly more so than some of my friends who are the same age. Sixteen years of competitive sports, including a not-so-minor fascination with women's rugby, led to strong muscles and multiple surgeries. With a little physical therapy, there was nothing the surgeries couldn't fix. That's the easy

*Joe Hollis. Photo courtesy Mountain Gardens.*



part. The hard part is dealing with symptoms that cannot be directly explained and with pain that I did not ask for. In one year's time my menstrual cycle has morphed from a known friend into a relentless monster. Like many women, it is the pain that plagues me the most.

It takes a lot to make me give in. I started backpacking for two weeks at a time by age ten, and it was the ranges of the Wallawas, the Steens, the Cascades, and the Bitterroots that taught me to stretch my physical limits. At first glance, I always looked like the kid who would falter on these trips, and so I vowed not to disappoint my peers or myself. This perseverance carried me through dozens of sports seasons with players that were faster and better than I, but who lacked the emotional endurance to propel their bodies in overtime.

Later in life, it was the Adirondacks, the Greens, the Whites, the Berkshires, the Wind Rivers, the Blacks, and the Smokies that showed me quite clearly what I had been given: the power of determination, an unwillingness to accept physical defeat, and a heart that could force my body to its limits. These lessons carried me through two years of undiagnosed food- and digestion-related ailments, biopsies, blood tests, and finally, a verdict of four major food allergies that changed my entire outlook on life.

So when the painful periods came, I had no choice but to pay attention. In some ways, relat-

ing to physical discomfort is part of how I've learned to live. I felt I had a hearty résumé to deal with this demon that my own body was creating. This time around, what I am learning is that the gentleness and expertise of others is the only medicine I have that works. It does

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*This time around, what I am learning is that the gentleness and expertise of others is the only medicine I have that works.*

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not matter that I know how to push myself. It does not matter that I've studied my own ailments under the intellectual microscope. It does not matter that I think I should be able to handle this; the fact is—I can't.

Which is why, on this sunny fall afternoon, I find myself climbing yet another mountain; but this time, the path leads to a well-known healer and I am the patient, not the conqueror. Joe has frizzy, shoulder-length gray hair and he wears olive-green polyester pants with a black leather belt. His ivory dress shirt is thin and worn, partly tucked in, partly loose around his hips. Despite his absent-minded appearance, he walks firmly, steadily, down the wooden steps of his cabin to greet me.

"I haven't made your prescription yet, so I will teach you how," he says. We've met half a dozen times before. The first two times were in the dark on his back porch, site of some of the best full-moon parties in the region. But I am never

sure if he remembers me. Today, in the daylight, is the first time I am certain he knows who I am because he skips the usual formalities of "who" and "how are you" and jumps right into: "So where are you living now?"

"With the Clarks, you know, in their studio. It's a nice little cabin. I'm helping them watch the place," I say. He nods approvingly, his plastic-rimmed glasses slipping slightly down his nose. I follow him up the rest of the stairs and into the library and Herb Shop. The building is nestled into a steep slope that overlooks his greenhouses, terraced gardens, solar panels, outdoor shower, and a few work sheds. The view from the porch reveals the opposite side of the valley, back across the mighty South Toe, and behind me I feel the spine of the Black Mountains that form the foundation of his humble home.

Inside, tapes, records, books, papers, woven baskets, and old photos are scattered over tabletops, sofas, and, mostly, the floor. Joe clears off the mixing table, moves the scale forward, and teaches me how to use it.

"I use this paper cup to measure with because it weighs exactly ten grams. That's why I haven't replaced it." The cup, some ancient version of a Dixie product, is brown with herb stains and dust. "And here is what you'll need." He turns to the west wall of the house, which is covered from floor to ceiling, end to end, with Mason jars of dried Chinese herbs and products. He begins to fill my arms with jars.



As he works, I gaze at the wall and see turtle shells and bright orange mushrooms, tree bark and mysterious eggs. I also notice several familiar tealeaves for sale on the Herb Shop counter. Every jar has a number and a name, which I learn about later, and even though they are old and dusty, they contain some of the most powerful healing herbs I have ever seen.

As I begin measuring out the different herbs into five packets, Joe says, "Do you want to stay and work a little bit, maybe for an hour or something?" This will be my payment to him and is the only discussion we have about money. While most are paying customers, Joe knows I don't have much, and he doesn't ask why—he just offers me the alternative. In exchange for his healing herbs, I fill my own prescription and help him around the lab a little. This is the agreement, no questions asked.

The concoction is amazing in every way. I begin with twelve grams of Bai Shao (angelica root). It is woody and pale, like a white stalk of asparagus. Immediately I discover this is very precise work. The chunks are bulky and some are as long as my pinky finger, so it requires finding just the right combination of sticks to reach the proper weight. Then I repeat the process four more times, measuring the herbs into five separate yogurt cups to the left of the scale. Unlike backpacking through the wilderness along mountain slopes, this work is delicate and requires more pre-

cision. Already I can feel a shift in my approach to the healing.

Next, I measure four different herbs at nine grams each. The Dang Gui is almost empty so Joe asks me to restock the Mason jar with a delivery that has arrived in the mail just this morning. While many of his tinctures and dried herbs are



from homegrown medicinals, this particular herb is shipped directly from China.

"I can't grow them all exactly right here," he explains. "I need them to be just right."

The lab fills with the smell of musty cinnamon and ginger while I measure the Dang Gui, which looks like dried banana peels. Next is Poria Fu Ling, a giant underground mushroom. It is odorless and comes in thin, solid white slabs that snap like sheetrock as I make my measurements. The Xiang Fu is deep brown, almost black, and has an earthy aromatherapy scent. It comes in smaller pieces and is easy to maneuver, so my measuring and weighing pick up speed. The last of the nine-gram measurements is Coix Lachryma Jobi, also known as "Job's Tears." The smell of stale

oats teases my nostrils as I contemplate the pain Job endured—pain that he did not ask for, the wrath of which felt unjustifiable.

"In some countries, this is eaten as a grain," Joe says, fingering the small barley-like pellets.

Jonathan, the apprentice, approaches the mixing table and introduces himself.

"It's so precise," I say, my fingers dropping small chunks of Tu Si Zi onto the scale one at a time. "And ancient. It feels ancient." The apprentice glances at the compressed bricks in my hand that resemble chunks of poppy seeds, then looks at me intently.

"It is ancient. The mixing is the best part. It makes you feel like an alchemist. Especially when you get to use the mortar and pestle." Behind him on the wall I notice the Creation Cycle poster, hand-illustrated and inscribed: "Wood burns to make Fire, whose ashes decompose into Earth, where are born and mined Metals, which enrich Water, which nourishes Wood." In short, this is the crux of Chinese medicine. The symbolism and analogies developed by the Chinese spring off this ideology, providing diagnosis and explanations. I finish the six gram herbs with Huai Niu Xi (very woody and gummy) and Yan Husuo (corydalis), which smells of old citrus peels and looks like amorphaously pressed dandelion heads.

The yogurt cups are filling up, and I still have four more herbs to go. Almost an hour has passed. All of this will be cooked following spe-



cific directions from my acupuncturist, who works closely with Joe on these prescriptions. I need to buy organic ginger root at the store when I am done, and my prescription will be complete. I add three grams of Zhi Ke to each cup. It is the shape of flattened coffee beans and just as dark.

Next is Hong Hua, or safflower, which smells oily and settles loosely into the growing piles I have made. Adding this bright orange-red herb feels like adding a giant rose to a bouquet of pale baby's breath—it is lively and uplifting and brings vitality to the prescription. This is followed by Chuan Xiong, which comes in small puzzle pieces, like the bark of the ponderosa pine tree. Last is the only herb I recognize, mint, also known as Bo He. It has to go into a separate container, and Joe offers specific instructions about precisely when and how to add it. The mint is powerful but fragile and cannot boil with the other herbs for long periods of time.

My prescription complete, I do an additional hour of work for Joe. I put new shipments of herbs away, I label a few things, and I fill a small prescription for another customer. Later, I sweep the porch and move a pile of bamboo to help him prepare for the party he is throwing tonight. When I leave, I gather my five bags of the prescription, plus five separate bags of the mint.

The pile is beautiful, fragrant, and inviting. I try to imagine all of this ground up and pressed into a single pill but I cannot.

Clutching these bags on my way down the steep steps to the road, I have empirical evidence of the intricacies of the level of pain I am dealing with. This prescription has not been developed to numb my body. I will not experience any mental alterations. The point is to encourage the proper movement of energy, to bring my emotions and intangible life scars back to center and let them flow through normal pathways. The point is also to get things moving in the right direction, letting my body release whatever it is trying to hold onto, instead of squeezing all of the pain inward.

Having been raised in the Western medical world, this is all very new to me. I have benefited greatly from appointments with knowledgeable, well-qualified doctors and specialists. But acupuncture and Chinese medicine have, to my surprise, been the single most beneficial practice I have pursued to date. I stumbled on this path through chance and faith and found myself climbing yet another mountain—literally and figuratively. This time, there is nothing external to prove. Instead, I will let life's lessons steep like the tea I've been prescribed, ingest the medicine, and take a long hard look at how I got here. ♦

Mountain Gardens is a botanical garden featuring the largest collection of native Appalachian and Chinese medicinal herbs in the Eastern U.S., organically grown at the foot of the Black Mountains in western North Carolina.

"For me, Mountain Gardens is both a place to live and a way to live, and, above all, 'visionary ecological theater.' I am trying to act on deep instincts and archetypal images related to human habitat and niche as a way of providing a sustainable values system with sufficient appeal to challenge the dominant consumer culture.

"I became interested in Chinese herbs as a result of a chance encounter with the book *Chinese Tonic Herbs* by Ron Teeguarden, which alerted me both to the existence of a category of health-promoting (as opposed to sickness-curing) herbs and to their long association with Taoism, a religion/philosophy with which I have a long association."

Joe Hollis, founder  
Mountain Gardens

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Katey Schultz writes from her home in Fork Mountain, North Carolina. She is currently enrolled in Pacific University's low-residency MFA program.



# MOVING FORWARD IN ISLAND, KENTUCKY

By JAMIE MERRIMAN-PACTON



I was lost somewhere on the lonely, corn-lined corridor of Kentucky Rural Route 2226. It was a blazing ninety-five degrees outside, and the August heat radiated from the pavement in waves. I knew I was close, but I'd taken a wrong turn somewhere after crossing over the sluggish Green River. Just south of me lay the town of Island, a tiny oasis in the tip of Western Kentucky, home to two Baptist churches, a dusty diner, and a dilapidated Optimist Club. My grandparents' farmhouse was somewhere within five square miles of where I stood, but I hadn't been able to find it, though I'd been driving around looking for it for forty-five minutes.

My cell phone got no service this deep in the country, so I couldn't call my mom, who was already at the farmhouse. I could hear her now, her voice rising with incredulity: "Jamie, you've been here hundreds of times,

surely you know your way to Grandma's. Hurry up, everyone's already here. We're eating in five minutes."

I pulled my car over and got out, hoping to divine the direction of the

farmhouse from the landscape. Corn, corn, silo, corn, hog farm, corn. No help in sight.

Somewhere close by was the air-conditioned farmhouse, its rooms full of my relatives, and its tables heavy with casseroles, noodle salads, and pies of all description. Grandma was a leap-year baby, and because forty peoples' schedules were hard to coordinate, we were celebrating her eighteenth birthday seven months late (that's seventy-two years in real time, but for a woman who has buried a husband and had brain surgery since her last leap-year birthday, we were willing to overlook details). My uncles would be outside, smoking cigarettes and talking about fishing; or, maybe my cousins would have taken their place. They wouldn't

*Verna and Billy Gene as teenagers.  
Photo courtesy Jamie Merriman-Pacton.*



have to hide behind the abandoned trailer at the back of the yard now that they were married and had children of their own. Not for the first time, I wished my husband had come with me, and that I hadn't given up cigarettes before this trip.

I took a deep breath, enjoying the clean, grassy smell of the country. My stomach grumbled, reminding me that I'd have more to digest than country air, if I'd just get moving. A white pickup truck was coming down the road. I waved and the truck stopped. My city sense, which had been honed by five years of living in Milwaukee and Chicago, sent a warning to my brain. I ignored it and crossed my fingers that the man in the truck was a helpful farmer, not a crazy slasher with a country retreat.

"Hi there," said the old man in the pickup, spitting chew into a cup at his side. "You lost?"

I was tempted, just for a second, to tell him I was sunbathing.

"No, I'm looking for the Rightmyer house," I said. I could hear the Southern accent creep into my voice. How my Chicago-bred husband laughed at me when I slipped into Southern Voice. "I know it's around here somewhere."

"You kin to them?"

"Yes sir, I'm Verna's granddaughter."

He looked at me for a long moment.

"Uh-huh. I can see that. Well, you're mighty close, just take your first left up there, then head on down the road. You'll be there in five minutes." He spit again.

I thanked him, ashamed of myself for thinking that anyone in the country could be anything other than friendly. Where were my manners?

He waved. I got back in the car and turned around.

In minutes, I was pulling into the long gravel driveway. Everything looked exactly as I remembered it. I honked at the children playing under the oaks in the front yard and

parked between the fat white water tank and the butterfly bushes.

My grandma, Verna, has lived in the same house most of her life; it's a spacious, rambling farmhouse with white aluminum columns supporting the front porch, a red brick façade, a newly screened-in back porch, and a dangerously steep set of stairs leading into the unfinished basement. This farmhouse has seen seven decades of her life: It was her childhood home, her married home, and now she lives in it all alone. In my adult life, I've never lived in one place longer than two years. Seventy years in the same house boggles my mind.

I walked into the house and was immediately pulled into a receiving line of hugs. Every woman in my family has the same wide, pointy chin. Chin after chin smashed into my shoulder as I moved deeper into the house.

"Grandma," I said, finding her at last. She was in the bathroom, spraying Aqua-net into her freshly curled, short black hair. "You look lovely. Happy birthday!"

"Oh, hush now Jamie," said Grandma, putting down the hairspray and giving me a kiss. "We're glad you're here, hon. But, let's get into that kitchen, it's time to eat."

She left me standing in the hallway looking at a wall of old photographs. My six aunts, their husbands, and my twenty-five cousins grew up before my eyes. I stopped in front of my favorite photo. In it Grandma and my grandpa, Billy Gene (a handsome Catholic boy from a nearby town) look young and ready for life on a farm. She sits on a tractor, her eyes bright and her smile wide; he stands in front of the tractor, shirtless, holding up a fish, a smug smile on his face, and his signature curl pomaded to his forehead. A year after the picture was taken, he was serving in a non-combat assignment during the Korean War, and she was taking care of a newborn and managing the farm.



After Grandpa got back from the war, he bought some cows and planted fields of tobacco. He and Grandma soon got down to the business of having a large family. They quickly found that their growing family needed more income than a roadside vegetable stand and a few cows could provide, so grandpa took a job at the Alcoa factory seventy miles away. He worked there five days a week for forty years, until his Alzheimer's made work impossible.



"JAMIE—" my twelve-year-old sister tugged on my arm, "Mom says dinner now!"

Not willing to incur the wrath of my hungry family if I kept them waiting, I followed her into the kitchen.

After dinner was done, I slipped out to the porch to watch the sunset, and think about my grandfather. His absence was conspicuous

during family gatherings.

Four years ago, on a cold January night, my father called me at my in-laws' house in Chicago to tell me my grandpa was dead. I hung up the phone and went outside in my slippers. As I watched the snow swirl through the suburban neighborhood, I tried to convince myself that my grandpa, Billy Gene Rightmyer, the smug boy in the photograph, was gone. The thought was as alien as the identical houses around me.

My husband and I left Chicago after dinner the next day. The stars were out and a bitter Midwestern wind whipped around our legs as we loaded our suitcases into the trunk. When it was my turn to drive, I kept half a mind on the road, but

the other half drifted toward our destination, the farmhouse. I was overwhelmed by memories of my grandpa as the snowy fields between Indianapolis and Lexington raced past.

First, there were the sensory memories: He always smelled like the sun, tobacco, and cologne. Then, there were the moments: him waltzing with my sister and me to Elvis records; my brothers and I playing Rummy with him until one o'clock in the morning on New Year's Eve; his face as he yelled at my cousins and me to get off his freshly rolled hay bales; me, a chunky eight year old with another bad perm, sitting at the piano pounding out Christmas carols and singing at the top of my lungs, and him saying to my mother, "Well, at least she's enthusiastic." Finally, his eccentricities rose in my mind. He always sopped up the last of his dinner gravy with a piece of bread. He never missed a Sunday at St. Sebastian's Catholic Church in Calhoun, and he always stayed for donuts and chocolate milk. One Christmas, he bought my grandma the biggest bottle of Estée Lauder's perfume "Beautiful" that he could find, because he liked the smell. It occurred to me as I drove on that cold night that the man was gone, but his taste in perfume lingered.

When my husband and I arrived at grandpa's wake, which was more of a reunion, because I had not seen my cousins, aunts, and uncles for three years, I slipped away from the hugs, tears, and exclamations. I stood before the coffin, trying to connect the person in my mind with the person in the coffin. Billy Gene, my grandpa, lay there with his curl pomaded into place and his hands cold and clay-like. Although pictures of him were everywhere, and my mother and her sisters told tearful stories about "Daddy" in all the corners of the room, I could not get a sense of the man. What part of Billy Gene, my beloved grandfather, remained in the waxy, rouged corpse lying there?

*Billy Gene and Verna Rightmyer.  
Photo courtesy Jamie Merriman-Pacton.*



Certainly, his death was not a surprise. He had battled Alzheimer's for four years, his memory getting worse, his age spots getting larger, and my grandmother losing a piece of him every day. But, warned or not, his death left me shaken. My grandpa was one of the people whose existence I had counted on.

Sometimes I compare myself to one of the houses on stilts that line the coastal shores of the Atlantic. The house on top, me, is held up and protected from the buffeting of the world by sturdy poles, or the people in my life. These poles prevent flooding during storms and ground the house in the earth. My grandfather was one of my main support beams. And then he was gone. Just like that. I felt wobbly all over. There was a hole in my scaffolding, and now, when the oceans of the world surged beneath me, I'd be a little less strong.

"Jamie, what are you doing out here all alone," said my grandma, peeking her head out the back porch door, and bringing me back to the moment at hand.

It was four years later, grandpa was dead, and we were having a party.

"We're fixing to have dessert and presents," Grandma said. "Get in here."

I stood up, shaking off the dust of memories and slapping a mosquito. At the farmhouse, life and dessert go on. Tsunamis hit, wars devastate, new technology happens, the president is elected, my grandfather dies, I get older, and life goes on. There is an art to moving forward, and I hope I can do it as well as my grandma.

I opened the back door and went inside, marveling at some of the changes I hadn't noticed at first.

Grandma had kept the orange shag carpet and the deer's head in the den, but she'd also hung stylish, muted paintings.

There was a new recliner in the living room, and jaunty Fiesta-patterned dishes in the kitchen cupboards. She had leased the fields and let the garden go. She even stays up later now and watches the occasional movie. She's had to adjust a little in the kitchen, because one person doesn't need a dozen biscuits or fifty jars of blackberry preserves. But one of her friends got her the cookbook *Going Solo in the Kitchen*, and she's learning. Earlier this summer, Grandma went to Iowa for my brother's wedding, and she's made it a personal goal not to miss any of her grandchildren's weddings, no matter how far away from Island they might be. In March she took a computer class for seniors at a local community college. Now, if she wanted, she could send e-mails instead of long, handwritten cards.

"Happy Birthday to you, Happy Birthday to you, Happy Birthday Dear Grandma."

I sing with the rest of my family. Grandma holds her hand over her heart and smiles.

"Make a wish," my seven-year-old sister Margaret shouts out.

"I wish your granddaddy were here to see how big you've gotten," Grandma says to Margaret, winking. "Now go get a plate, shug, this cake is ready to be eaten."

I love that Grandma is still learning, living, laughing, and changing. This is a refreshing thought—to know that at seventy-two, life is still unfolding. It makes every piece of cake better than the last, every conversation full of possibility, and every moment linger in the memory. I take a huge piece of cake and sit down with my mom and Grandma at the kitchen table, happy to let time stop for a moment, while everyone around me talks about how much they've changed. ♦

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Jamie Merriman-Pacton is a second-year master of arts student at ETSU. She grew up in Jonesborough, Tennessee, where her parents and most of her nine siblings still live. After earning an English degree from Marquette University in Milwaukee and working all over the country for five years, Jamie moved back to East Tennessee with her husband and her dog.



# WILDNESS IN THE GARDEN OF THE STATUS QUO

By RANDY SANDERS



The year was 1932. The Great Depression was at full tilt. The number of unemployed Americans reached thirteen million. Average wages were sixty percent less than they had been just three years before. Rosa Louise McCauley married that year. That same year saw the return of a twenty-seven-year-old Myles Horton to his native Tennessee to open the Highlander Folk School in Monteagle.

Seventy-five years later, in 2007, the re-named and relocated Highlander Research and Education Center in New Market, Tennessee, might be permitted to rest on well-deserved laurels, but that was not and is not

the “Highlander way.” Whether the year is 1932, 2007, or some year yet-to-be, no telling of the story of social and economic justice in America is truly complete without the inclusion of the Highlander Center.

And what about Rosa Louise McCauley, that nineteen-year-old bride in 1932, whose life would later intersect and be affected by the Highlander Folk School? Her conviction and courage resulted in her being the first woman to lie in state in the rotunda of the U.S. Capitol building—Rosa McCauley Parks, known to many as the mother of the civil rights movement. Rosa Parks’s connection to the Highlander Folk School is an il-

*Martin Luther King, Pete Seeger, Charis Horton, Rosa Parks, and Ralph Abernathy at Highlander, 1959.  
Photo courtesy Highlander Research and Education Center.*



lustrious part of the Highlander legacy, but that enshrined story is not my focus.

Numerous books and articles have told the story of Myles Horton and the Highlander Folk School. A simple typing of his name into any search engine produces tens-of-thousands of hits. A quote from his book *The Long Haul: An Autobiography*, written with Judith Kohl and Herbert Kohl, sheds light on his vision for Highlander: "To get something like this going in the first place you have to have a goal. That goal shouldn't be one that inhibits the people you're working with, but it should be beyond the goal you expect them to strive for. If your goal isn't way out there somewhere and isn't challenging and daring enough, then it is going to get in your way and it will also stand in the way of other people. Since my goal happened to be a goal of having a revolutionary change in this country and all over the world, it's unlikely to get in the way in the near future."

Challenging and daring goals were never abstractions to Myles Horton—they were and are the visionary, never-ending heartbeat of the Highlander Center. Consider, for example, the Highlander Center's own website. Under "Highlander's History" is information about the labor years, 1930 to 1953; civil rights and the Citizenship Schools, 1953 to 1961; conservative backlash and transitions, 1957 to 1971; Appalachian people's struggles in the 1970s and '80s; and the twenty-first century Highlander. Highlander Center history includes giants of twentieth-century America: Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Ralph David Abernathy, Eleanor Roosevelt, Pete Seeger, and Rosa Parks. But it is the determined, collective chorus of little-remembered voices for social and economic justice that provide the timbre to the Highlander Center's list of luminaries. As Horton put it, "I came to realize that things had to be done through organizations. I knew that people

as individuals would remain powerless, but if they could get together through organizations, they could have power, provided they use their organizations and not be used by them."

If life is viewed as a crossing of threads that weave the fabric of fate, then Amelia Kirby's connection to the Highlander Center is a durable one. Begin with the thread of Dr. Helen Lewis. She is considered by many to be a progenitor of Appalachian studies as a discipline. She developed an interdisciplinary course in the field at Clinch Valley College (now the University of Virginia's College at Wise) in the 1970s and has her own enduring connections to the Highlander Center. It was in a Helen Lewis strip-mining seminar that Rich Kirby met Beth Bingman.

And although their life threads crossed because of a mutual interest in the issue of strip-mining, Rich and Beth came to share another connection—each other. They fell in love, bought some land along the Clinch River in Scott County, Virginia, and started their family.

Amelia Kirby, their daughter and Highlander's newest board member, has fond memories of the center. "My parents were always going to meetings at the Highlander Center. Initially, it was community organizing around the issue of strip-mining that drew them there. Later, my mom got involved in popular education and adult literacy work. That later work of hers continued my association at Highlander.

"It was great when the Highlander Center opened their children's center downstairs. That gave us kids a place to land. I recently learned something interesting about the children's center. As I understand it, there was a gendered dialogue of women

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*"It was great when the Highlander Center opened their children's center downstairs. That gave us kids a place to land."*

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saying that ‘Highlander needs to have space for kids because we, as people who are doing justice work, have children, and they have to be somewhere. We cannot do justice work without a place for our kids.’ I think that is really significant because Highlander did what they always do—they listened and responded.

“I also have great memories of the Highlander children’s camp. I was five years old

the first time I went, and I went every year after that, almost all the way through high school. Those camps were glorious fun.

“One of the things about that time in my life that I didn’t really think about until my parents brought it up to me was about my life in southwest Virginia and at the Highlander Center. Both Scott County [where she lived] and Wise County [where she went to school] are and were extremely

white communities. In my day-to-day life I was not around people of color very much. Going to those camps at Highlander and being around a lot of different kids from different backgrounds and color was a very rich environment for me.”

After graduating from St. Paul High School in 1995, Amelia headed north to Hampshire College in western Massachusetts. As a liberal arts college, Hampshire encourages students to be lifelong learners and to advance the cause of social justice and the well-being of others.



“Hampshire College has an alternative structure; it doesn’t have grades and is much more evaluation-based. You design your own program there. It was exactly what I wanted.

“I found myself focusing a lot of my work throughout the four years I was there on Appalachian issues. My senior thesis was about Red Onion State Prison, which is a super-maximum security prison in Pound [Virginia] that opened in August of 1998.”

Amelia worked for a year in Boston after graduating and then returned to Appalachia. She went to work at Appalshop, a non-profit, multi-disciplinary arts and education center in Whitesburg, Kentucky.

Again, threads crossed. In April of 1999, a soon-to-be Appalshop colleague named Nick Szuberla filmed the opening ceremony of Wise County’s second super-maximum security prison, Big Stone Gap’s Wallens Ridge. With Amelia’s arrival at Appalshop in the fall of 2000, she found a like-minded collaborator in Nick. A shared interest in the social, economic, and cultural implications of propping up a local coal-based economy with a prison economy set loose their ongoing examination of the United States prison industry generally, and Wallens Ridge specifically. (To investigate incarcerations as a business, see Judith A. Greene’s contribution to *Invisible Punishment: The Collateral Consequences of Mass Imprisonments* at [www.justicestrategies.net/Judy/EntrepreneurialCorrections.pdf](http://www.justicestrategies.net/Judy/EntrepreneurialCorrections.pdf).)

It is worth noting that both Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch are two of the groups concerned about physical and psychological guard-against-inmate abuses at Red Onion and Wallens Ridge. And as Amelia points out, the psychological pressures correctional officers feel can extend out into the community in a “taking your work home with you” dynamic.

Myles Horton holding Jacob Gaventa and Amelia, circa 1980.  
Photo courtesy Amelia Kirby.



Amelia and Nick's collaboration has resulted in many works centered on the theme of prisons: *Holler to the Hood*, a call-in, hip-hop radio program that serves as a means for listeners, particularly prisoner family members, to relay messages to their loved ones; a play in two acts, *Thousand Kites*, that is intentionally structured to encourage community dialogue; and a sixty-minute documentary entitled *Up the Ridge*. (Visit [www.appalshop.org/h2h/film/](http://www.appalshop.org/h2h/film/) to learn more about this already-acclaimed film.)

"One of the frameworks within which we work is that rural communities, where the majority of prisons are built, and the majority of the communities from which prisoners come—low income, urban, places of color—in the big picture have an enormous amount in common. Both [groups] are culturally divided in some very intentional ways and encouraged to see the differences between them. Our work has always been about bridging those differences and finding ways for communities to hear from one another.

"In 2002 or 2003 an organization called Critical Resistance, a prison abolition movement, got in touch with us and asked us to participate in an organizing committee to arrange a Southern Conference. The first meeting [of the organizing committee] was at Highlander.

"It was a little surreal to go there as a guest of this 'outside' group which was using the space—a space that had been a very different thing to me over the years—to do organizing work. That was the first time I was really aware of the myth and legend around Highlander, that it occupies this sacred space in people's understanding of justice organizing in this country. In that

moment, I found myself in two different worlds: Highlander as a second home and Highlander as hallowed ground."

When asked about her new role as a board member at Highlander, she said, "I'm excited to be able to share an Appalachian perspective, especially a perspective from the coalfields. That's an important voice I hope to carry in that dialogue. And to carry the vision of the work we do [at Appalshop], which is building cross-cultural understanding and unity within Appalachia and between Appalachia and the South and beyond. As the South is changing with in-migration, there is a lot of work to be done and room for conversations that are different than they might have been thirty years ago.

"At Highlander's seventy-fifth anniversary celebration, I was thrilled to participate in a cultural organizing day-long workshop. We had a lot of conversations about 'What does cultural organizing mean' and about using cultural work in activism. Again and again we came back to the idea that one does not use cultural work in activism; cultural work is activism. Whatever piece of justice you are aiming at, that idea is central to it.

"I know from my upbringing in my family, but also very directly connected to my parents' participation in Highlander and my experience of their participation in Highlander, how present that idea of cultural work as activism is—be it through music, theatre, visual art, media, or whatever form it takes. That's got to be right in the heart of things to really get them moving."

It's easy to imagine a smiling Myles Horton standing in the garden of the status quo, as Amelia, hoe in hand, enters to carry on the never-ending work of justice for all. ❖



# WILD AND ELUSIVE: THE APPALACHIAN “PAINTER”

By MICHAEL JOSLIN

Modern technology has left few mysteries to Earth. Yet still today an enigmatic shadow haunts the Appalachian Mountains. Painters, those mythical black panthers that have prowled through mountain folk tales for generations, refuse to disappear. Are they here, lurking just beyond the sensors of forestry officials, or are they figments of our imagination, revenants called up by our sore need for the wild?

For years I have heard painter tales, some from the past, some from the present. Always, the firsthand reports carry the ring of truth as the teller's excitement animates the tale. Cougars have been an important part of mountain lore for generations, as shown by the variety of names: panther, painter, catamount, and mountain lion. Re-



ports by early settlers frequently mention the unnerving screams of the painters and their attacks on livestock and even people. However, as farmers brought the wilds into cultivation and hunters roamed the wilderness killing the predators as well as

the deer they fed upon, the mountain lions gradually disappeared from the everyday lives of the people.

Yet they have always lingered in the shadows of the forest and the mind. The fierce, independent creatures represent wildness, a fundamental part of mountain heritage, and many folks are pleased to feel that catamounts still haunt the forests. When I lived in the Pensacola area under the Black Mountains in Yancey County, North Carolina, I frequently heard folks talk about the paint-

*Aspen, the male cougar in the habitat on Grandfather Mountain.  
Photo courtesy Michael Joslin.*



ers, black as night, that haunted the pass near Ogle Meadows. When I moved to Greasy Creek under Roan Mountain, old-timers told of their personal encounters, and those of their friends and relatives, with mountain lions that roamed the thick forests clothing the Roan's high walls.

It wasn't long until I, too, had my cougar story.

On a crackling cold November night in 1985, after supper I went for a walk with my three hounds on Greasy Creek in the Buladean Community under Roan Mountain. We walked up into the pasture across from the old Moseley house and climbed to the top of a small knoll. A single star shone through the clouds which glowed dimly. In the dark valley, piles of snow heaped in deep coves and other sheltered places gave the only detail to the rugged landscape.

As I stood on the knoll enjoying the cold beauty of the night, a piercing scream came from the ridge across from me. The hair rose on the back of my neck. I feared something awful had happened to my wife. The scream came again, shattering the night's peace. As I took a first slippery step in the dark, my dogs ran to me, whining and clustering around my legs. These large hounds had fearlessly attacked beasts ranging from groundhogs to bears without hesitation. But their fear got my attention. As the shrill cry pierced the frigid air again, I realized it came from the crest of the high ridge facing me.

Suddenly I knew a cat made the noise. At first I thought it might be a bobcat, but then I realized it must be a panther, the legendary painter of the mountains, calling from the cold hills. I had always heard its call described as a woman's scream, but different, a sound like no other. As I stood, ringed by whining dogs, I

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*As I stood on the knoll enjoying  
the cold beauty of the night,  
a piercing scream came from  
the ridge across from me.*

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heard a faint, distant scream echo up the narrow valley. Immediately I thought the answering voice came from atop the Eagle Cliffs that jut above Buladean from the end of the Roan. The night glowed with a singular clarity.

The next morning I climbed to the top of the ridge. There I found large cat prints, about four inches in diameter. There was no other sign.

For nearly ten years, two biologists at Lees-McRae College in Banner Elk, North Carolina, have sought such stories as they attempt to sort myth from reality concerning mountain lions in the local area. In 1998 Gene Spears and Stewart Skeate posted signs throughout Northeast Tennessee, Northwestern North Carolina, and Southwest Virginia seeking reports of cougar sightings. A steady flow of stories has rewarded their efforts. Since that time, in addition to numerous secondhand accounts, they have received over seventy credible reports

from the surrounding counties of Western North Carolina and East Tennessee.

"Almost all the sightings have been over the last ten years and the majority over the last three or four years. We weeded out a lot that were questionable, but we were left with many solid, without-a-question reports. It was very surprising, and this was probably only a fraction of the total sightings," says Skeate, as he pulls out his worksheet showing the counties, type of terrain, time, cat color, and other information.

Avery County, the home of Lees-McRae, has the most reports, with Ashe, Watauga, Mitchell, Yancey, McDowell, Wilkes, Caldwell, and Burke each contributing credible tales. The Tennessee counties of Carter, Washington, and Unicoi also reported sightings.

"Eighty-four percent of the observations were during daylight hours. This is important because people get a really good look in the light. All these reports were of full-grown cats," says Skeate, his back to his desk with his computer and piles of research materials.

The sightings occurred most commonly in the morning (41%) and on roads (60%). There was a 60/40 split between tan and black cats.

"Historically people have referred to the 'painters' as black. They have been here literally for centuries. You see melanistic (melanin is a dark animal pigment) forms of cats all over the world. Typically, the leopard in Africa is light colored,



but when they get into the forests of Southeast Asia, they turn dark.

"It wouldn't be surprising that in the Appalachians with the heavily forested environment, you get the melanistic strain," says Skeate.

Agreeing with Skeate is a wildlife expert from New York, Peter O'Shea, who is the conservation chair of the St. Lawrence/Adirondack Chapter of the National Audubon Society. O'Shea believes the cougar population in the East does include a number of these black panthers.

"There's a possibility in the East of a genetic bottleneck. I and many others feel that the eastern cougar did in fact almost, but not quite, become extirpated.

"There was such a low number of cougars that certain genes were lost and other genes were fixed in the population, and as the population rebounds we could be seeing the strong emergence of a strain of black animals as the product of this," says O'Shea in a December 1996 *Outdoor Life* article.

Skeate points to his chart, indicating the activities some observers reported seeing the cats involved in: eating a rabbit, chasing a rabbit, killing a fawn, and eating cat food on a porch. His colleague, Gene Spears, tells of one woman's account of her neighborhood panther.

"She was building a new house up on Beech Mountain. Her dog, a Golden Retriever, was out in the front yard. The cougar jumped out and chased the dog. The dog ran under the house and got away. The woman was there watching. After the cat failed in its attempt to get

the dog, it just left. She and her husband even saw the cat sunning itself on rocks, and it didn't seem to be afraid of her. Apparently, there was a pretty well known one on Beech Mountain," says Spears.

The ever-increasing development of wild mountain land often leads to such encounters. Mountain lions have large territories, but they stick pretty well to home, except when modern civilization disturbs their habitat.

"The stories you hear around here are when people are building a new house in an area that's not developed where there is a cougar. After the house is built, the cougar moves on," says Spears.

Such reports are common in the area. The late Hugh Morton, Grandfather Mountain's grandfather, heard many tales, but one in the last decade caught his attention.

"Dr. Nathan Hodges, then president of Mayland Community College, came up here and said he lived on the Spruce Pine golf course at Grassy Creek. He said there was a cougar coming into his backyard. I said to Dr. Hodges, 'Get me a picture.'

"A month later he showed up with a picture. I showed it to Mr. Younger," said Morton, nodding toward Richard Evans Younger, a noted wildlife artist and expert who was visiting Morton.

"There was no doubt about it," said Younger.

"It was not the best photography, but it was good enough to see the long tail. It was definitely a cou-

gar, and it was definitely in his backyard in Spruce Pine," said Morton, a renowned wildlife photographer himself. Morton forwarded the picture to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in Atlanta, where it disappeared.

A couple of years later, the late Dr. Bob Payne told me about a cougar that came to drink at a pond in Grassy Creek near his home. Several homeowners in the development saw the large cat. The pond is not far from the golf course where Hodges took his picture. The persistence of such corroborative sightings is tantalizing, but the lack of physical evidence undercuts such anecdotes.

In Valle Crucis, North Carolina, an amateur videographer contributed his bit to the quest to document a mountain lion population in the region. At a building site surrounded by high ridges, Art Lynch wielded his shovel on a cold, early December night, digging a pond to be part of the water feature to surround a large house under construction. Halogen lights harshly illuminated his work, pushing back the darkness of eleven o'clock. Suddenly, a strange sound disturbed the steady rhythm of his shovel cutting into the ground and pouring the dirt to the side.

"I heard a—not a typical cat sound, not a scream—a bark or loud cough. I turned the halogen lights out towards the woods. The thing walked straight across the field. What struck me was the swagger, the predatory stalk, the attitude in every step. It was quite muscu-



lar in the shoulders,” said Lynch, recalling that night four years ago when he first saw the cougar that haunted the house site.

As he watched, the large cat walked straight up the slope, its thick, bushy tail trailing. Reaching the tree line, it crouched down into the shadows.

“It watched me for two or three hours. I think it was still there after one in the morning. I brought around another set of lights. I could see its eyes shining. It just watched me, sat and watched,” said Lynch, whose Western Carolina Waterscapes business operates out of Asheville.

About a week or ten days later, with snow covering the ground, he came upon a set of paw prints in the white blanket.

“The tracks covered seven and a half feet for all four paws. And these prints were gigantic,” said Lynch, who then looked around the house for more prints.

“There were rabbit tracks dot, dot, dot down the driveway in back. There were large cat tracks outside, up to the edge of the driveway. I saw where the cat leapt; then there were marks of a scuffle and some blood. No more rabbit tracks,” he said, pointing out where he read the story told by tracks in the snow.

Some other workers building the house itself told him they had to board up the solarium under construction because, “There’s a big cat coming around.” Gathering these facts and anecdotes, Lynch approached wildlife officials, only

to encounter “a lot of skepticism, a lot of doubt.” His tangible proof melted with the snow. Lynch decided to keep a sharp lookout whenever he worked the site.

Almost exactly a year later, early in December 2004, his perseverance paid off. At seven or eight in the evening, he was setting up his lights to work. He stood among some boulders under the ground-



floor deck. Holding a light stick with a thousand watts of halogen bulbs in it, he looked toward the deck.

“A large cat looked right over the edge at me. It was about fifteen feet above and fifteen feet away from me. For two seconds we were face to face. My heart was pounding. There was no mistaking what it was. I said, ‘Well, hello kitty.’

“It kind of rolled and turned and went off,” said Lynch. “I ran to my truck to get my video camera. I felt like I was about to burst a blood vessel.”

He returned to the house, walked out on the deck and shined his lights toward the tree line. Eyes blazed back at him. Then with his

camera, Lynch recorded the big cat’s movements. The footage he captured that night shows unmistakably a cat with a long tail. Its image dark and grainy, the large cat moves down the field, crosses the road, crouches, comes back across, climbs up the bank, and pauses, looking right into the camera.

When Lynch realized what he had, he began to contact cougar experts throughout Western North Carolina. The local wildlife officer referred him to Stewart Skeate, who visited Lynch at the construction site and carefully examined the footage.

“It’s convincing due to the gait of the cat, the long tail, the long legs, the light spot on the chest, and the size of the head,” says Skeate. “All appear to be typical of a mountain lion. Unfortunately, it is dark and at a long distance. It’s not as clear as we would like; nonetheless, it is strongly suggestive of a mountain lion and to date it is the best evidence we have outside of eyewitness accounts.”

From Apple Hill Farm, an alpaca ranch and educational facility to teach folks about animals, located only a few miles as the crow flies from this construction site, comes another cougar story. “We had five alpacas attacked in the spring of 2004. Four of them died and one survived,” said Lee Rankin, looking across her paddocks as if seeing the disaster once again. “It was awful, pretty gruesome. The fence was



completely destroyed. I had a hard time finding them."

She found three of the alpacas dead, scattered around the property, and two survivors that had made it to the barn. She took these two to the University of Tennessee for treatment. One, whose shoulder was completely severed, died; the other lived to prance again in the pastures.

While the county wildlife officer attributed the attacks to dogs, Lee was convinced a mountain lion was the predator.

"We heard from a hunter that he had been hunting around here and that he was sure he was after a mountain lion," she said. "A vet at UT called and said that he had just put a drain in a puncture wound that was five inches deep. He said it wasn't possible for a dog to inflict a puncture wound that deep without tearing. He thought it was a large cat."

When she later sheared Mojo, the surviving alpaca, she discovered claw mark scars. They were widely spaced, and when she called Stewart Skeate for his opinion, after examining the wounds he said that only a large cat could have left such scars. Other incidents in the past two years have convinced Lee that predator cats lurk in the area.

Lee Rankin determined she would never suffer such a loss again.

She has developed an expensive, multi-layered plan of defense. From her personal pack of dogs to stately llamas, she is ready for anything. Her dogs wander the prop-

erty freely to give warning. She also has a group of sacrificial Boer goats to offer to hungry cougars. Placed between the woods and the alpacas, the goats, prized for their meat, should be an attacker's first choice.

Next she has her large donkeys, Maw and Jack, behind a high-tensile electric fence. The donkey run encircles the alpaca pen; donkeys

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*Many cougar tales come from  
the wilderness where man  
is the interloper and the  
beast is at home.*

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are known for their ability to attack and kill predators. Between the donkeys and the alpacas is a no-climb mesh fence. Inside that fence are the alpacas and their guardian llamas.

Such a defensive plan does not come cheap and shows Rankin's certainty that she faces a predator capable of circumventing normal protective measures. Her alpaca has the scars to prove it.

Many cougar tales come from the wilderness where man is the interloper and the beast is at home. Richard Jackson, retired librarian at Lees-McRae and a lifelong resident of Appalachia, met his painter three years ago on Unaka Mountain in Carter County, Tennessee. He and a friend were driving toward Red Fork Falls as they descended from the Stamping Grounds on the mountain's crest when he spotted a tawny-colored animal.

"It was just dusky dark in fall. Deer are common in that area, so at first I didn't pay much attention. I just thought, 'That's a funny looking deer.' Then I noticed his tail, a long tail with a black tip on the end of it," says Jackson, who has been an outdoorsman all his life. "He ran across the road in front of the truck, then leapt up the bank above the road. It jumped over a blowdown and turned and looked straight at me. That's when I noticed its round ears. Of course, the long tail with the black tip was already a sure giveaway. He wasn't in any hurry. He seemed more curious than anything."

Such stories abound up and down the Appalachians from Georgia to Maine. Yet the United States Fish and Wildlife Service remains skeptical. Even physical evidence, such as a road-killed cougar kitten in Kentucky in 1997, scat from Massachusetts, a dead cougar and a captured one in West Virginia, does not convince the Service. During the past five years the Service has conducted its own study of this endangered and threatened cat, "a review of scientific and commercial information to determine the status of the endangered eastern cougar, the first review the Service has done since publishing a recovery plan in 1982," according to the USFWS website [www.fws.gov/northeast/ecougar/](http://www.fws.gov/northeast/ecougar/). While the fact gathering has been completed, the report is still being compiled.

An important issue that the Service will determine is whether the eastern cougar is extinct, or even if



the eastern cougar is a distinct species. This determination is crucial, because protective status is granted only to the eastern cougar, and the USFWS "has for years presumed the eastern cougar was extinct, having no verifiable evidence, such as DNA, to the contrary. Although many people have seen cougars in the East, and some have taken photographs, the animals sighted may not be the subspecies known as the eastern cougar," according to the website.

"The problem is that we don't have a genetic fingerprint from the eastern cougar, so we're not sure what it actually was," says Skeate.

According to a news release from the USFWS: "The eastern cougar subspecies *Puma concolor cougar* was described in 1946 on scant evidence from measurements taken from museum specimens of just eight cougar skulls from three

Mid-Atlantic States. The historical range of the eastern cougar was a guess but stands to this day. Based on this evidence, the eastern cougar was one of the first subspecies added to the federal List of Threatened and Endangered Wildlife."

The release continues: "The validity of the eastern cougar as a subspecies is in question. The recent research by Melanie Culver, Ph.D., at the University of Maryland indicates that the eastern cougar is not genetically unique and suggests that all North American cougars could be categorized as a single subspecies. These new analyses will be considered in the Service's status review."

Cougar aficionados take this argument seriously because if the USFWS continues to list the eastern cougar as a separate subspecies, protection for cougars in the East remains negligible, and document-

ed cougar finds will continue to be dismissed because the cougars cannot be proven to be eastern cougars and thus are classified as escaped pets or strayed western cougars not worthy of protection.

Such political and economic considerations cannot hide the reality of the wild beasts roaming the region's woodlands, nor the need we feel to keep Appalachia untamed. The more today's virtual civilization isolates us from actual experience, the more we need to touch something that moves us deeply. From man's earliest days in the mountains we know as Southern Appalachia, a brush with a cougar sent adrenalin coursing through his veins, reminding him how sweet life is. Appalachia's many tales of painters persist because this archetypal beast slinks through the shadows of our consciousness as surely as it prowls through the dark forest. ♦

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A frequent contributor to *Now & Then*, Michael Joslin lives with his wife, Pam, on a farm in the Buladean community of Mitchell County, North Carolina. Through photography and stories, he celebrates the wildness, beauty, and values of Appalachian nature and culture. He is a professor at Lees-McRae College in Banner Elk, North Carolina, where he teaches literature, writing, and photography.



# THE PERFECT TEN

By KAREN TRAVIS



**O**n August 20, 2007, Bays Mountain Nature Preserve in Kingsport, Tennessee, added four new wolf pups to its wolf pack, bringing the total number to ten. The gray wolves, also known as timber wolves, were purchased at Bear Country USA in Rapid City, South Dakota. They arrived at the park around midnight on May 25 and were introduced to the public the following morning. Because timber wolves are extinct in the eastern United States, which includes the Appalachian region, it is only through preserves like Bays Mountain that they can still be observed.

Bays Mountain, a 3,550-acre preserve, began its gray wolf habitat in the early 1990s as the fascination with wolves was on the increase. A reintroduction project was underway in Yellowstone National Park, where plenty of natural habitat wilderness was available for wolf packs to roam and reproduce.

Bays Mountain's first set of wolves came from Wolf Park in Indiana in the fall of 1992. The three gray wolves were Navarro, Kashtin, and Djenoun. The gray wolf species, of which timber wolves are a subspecies, can range from white to solid black and can even

*Photo courtesy Karen Travis.*



be tri-colored. This first grouping of pups arrived at the park when they were six months old. In 1995, it was time to expand the wolf pack and include three more. Nayehi, a tri-colored male, his brother Kanati, and a female named Askina were added to the pack. In less than two years, Nayehi had established himself as the new pack alpha.

By 2003, both Askina and Navarro had died of unknown causes. Three male wolves, Kiva, Ahote, and Wayha, and one female, Kawoni, were the newest members of the pack. Following their arrival, two other wolves, Djenoun and Kashtin, died from old age. With six remaining wolves and an enclosure built to accommodate ten, in 2007 it was once again time to add four new gray wolves to the pack.

During the three months between the pups' arrival and their introduction into the current pack, a lengthy process had to be completed in order to prepare them for their new family. It was essential that the pups be socialized by humans in order for them to be viewable by the public. Wolves are shy by nature, and had the wolves in the pack raised them, they would likely never have been seen by the public.

Bays Mountain naturalist Rhonda Goins and her husband Rick made the trek to South Dakota to pick up the pups. The two males are Adahy (meaning "Lives in the Woods") and Tanasi ("Little Tennessee"). The two females are Aiyana ("Eternal Blossom") and Netar ("New Home Place").

From the very beginning they began howling with the young animals. The howling is an essential part of being recognized as part of a pack. It is a communication tool that allows pack members to reunite when separated as well as establish their territory and warn off any other wolf packs.

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*Rather than imprinting. . . they viewed the humans as odd-looking wolves, who hand-fed, socialized, and cared for them. . .*

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The puppies would not see the wolves for a while, but the adults in the park knew from the beginning there were new wolves present. Not only were there howls, there was the sharing of scented sticks from the puppies' pen. Every day for a number of weeks, sticks were tossed into the adult pen to introduce the scent of the new pups to the wolves.

There are four enclosures to the wolf pen, and the adult wolves were kept in the one opposite the puppies, where they were also most likely to be seen by the public. However, the wolves spent a lot of time in the upper corner of the pen closer to the new additions, anxious to catch a glimpse. It would be a few weeks before the puppies would first get a real look at the adult wolves.

Three puppy parents were waiting for them when they first arrived at Bays Mountain on the night of

May 25. From that time until the wolves were introduced into the rest of the pack, the puppies received round-the-clock attention by the volunteers. The puppies were first kept in a small covered enclosure to prevent any predators from causing harm or loss of life. When the pups arrived, they weighed between three and five pounds and were perfect prey for the likes of bobcats and great horned owls. The presence of a human in the pen helped deter a potential attack.

The first week of life in their new habitat was stressful for the animals. They were taken from their mother when they were seven days old. This had to be accomplished before either their eyes or ears were open. It was essential that the pups not see or hear their natural parents in order to make the socialization process more successful. When the pups did open their eyes, they saw humans. Rather than imprinting, as birds do, they viewed the humans as odd-looking wolves, who hand-fed, socialized, and cared for them until it was time for the Goins to pick them up. By that time the pups were eating from bowls. Their diets consisted of milk replacer, some raw meat, and puppy food.

A training class had been required for all volunteers who wanted to become a part of the program, including park naturalist Rhonda Goins. Like many others, she worked her full-time job and spent all of her off time at the puppy enclosure, affectionately referred to as the Puppy Palace.



Bringing in four-week-old puppies is not a flawless process. There was an animal care issue the first week. Tanasi, a male, developed a urinary tract infection. Because wolves should not be separated from one another at any time unless it is absolutely necessary, a urine sample had to be collected from within the pen and taken to the vet.

When the pups reached weights between twenty-five and thirty pounds, they were allowed to go into the larger enclosure. They had been allowed to play there in daylight but had not been permitted to sleep there until this weight was reached. Shortly thereafter, no wolf was allowed to stay in the pen overnight. It was the first step toward alone time for the pups, but volunteers had to get up at regular intervals during the night to check on them.

With the pups large enough to be left alone at night, it was time to begin cross-scenting them—a new phase in their preparation to become part of the wolf pack. During the puppies' first close-up look at the adult wolves, there was a great deal of whining and airplane ears (ears flat out to the side) and tail-wagging on both sides of the fence.

On one particular day, the wolves unearthed a mud salamander. They left very little unturned or unexplored.

Early in the summer it was especially important to introduce the scents of the puppies to Kawoni, the only adult female in the pack. Because she was alpha by default,

it was unclear if she would act and behave as necessary when the pups entered the full pack. However, as the scents were introduced, and as the two sets of wolves got to see one another more often, Kawoni became increasingly anxious to meet the new arrivals. She constantly paced the fence nearest to the pups and whined at them. Every time a scented item was tossed into the pen, she would take it away from



any other wolf who might have gotten to it first. These were all good signs that she would accept the puppies and become their mother figure.

As their surrogate parents, the humans had to establish an alpha status and retain that status throughout the summer. The pups were not allowed to bite on puppy parents as they would one another, but puppy parents were allowed to play with them. The wolves could have their bellies scratched and be petted, but unlike domestic dogs, no rough

play was allowed. The pups could not be touched unless they were aware of human presence; otherwise a bite could occur.

The job of the adults in the pen was to socialize the pups so they wouldn't be afraid of humans and would wander throughout the pen so visitors could observe them. Pups are pups though. They would try the patience and resolve of the human parents to remain alpha. When they became aggressive and would not stop biting or chewing on the volunteers, it became necessary to make the pups submit. In doing so, the pups were taken by the scruff of the neck and by the belly, rolled onto their back, and held until their bodies became limp in submission. They eventually tucked their tails and laid back their ears as they greeted the volunteers. This is the way wolves greet one another.

Wolf pups grow at a much faster rate than domestic dogs. In order to survive in the wild and run with the pack, wolves achieve near-adult size within six to seven months. However, males are not mature wolves until they are about two years old, and females are not mature until they are about three.

The diet of the puppies changed at a steady rate throughout the summer. They needed the nutrients they were not receiving from mothers' milk as well as the nutrients to help their young bodies grow. Their diet began with small amounts of Nebraska Brand horse meat blended to-



gether with puppy food and milk replacer. As the puppies got older and healthier, the diet moved toward raw, ground up horse meat, supplemented with daily vitamins. As adults, the wolves eat much like they would in the wild. They are fed twice a week. Their large stomachs and slower digestion make it unnecessary to feed more often. In the wild wolves only kill what they will eat when they are hungry. They gorge themselves, eating eighteen to twenty pounds of meat at one time. If there are any pups left behind, parents return to the pack and regurgitate food to feed the puppies and the pack member who remained with them.

When it was suddenly time to say our farewells to the puppies, we held our breath as the introduction to the adult wolves began. They had been separated earlier in the morning on August 20. The adult female, Kawoni, and the omega male, Kanati, were in one pen. Because there was only one female in the pack, she would be introduced to the puppies first. It was hoped that

she would bond with the puppies and become their natural protector.

As she and Kanati entered the pen everyone was tense. She was not immediately taken with the pups up close. Being alpha by default, she was unsure what to make of these new wolves. However, it did not take her long to begin bonding with them. Before their introduction to the puppies, the adult wolves were fed well because they were expected to regurgitate for the food-begging pups. Once all of the adults had been introduced to the puppies, Kawoni quickly established her place with them. While the alpha male should have become the father figure, he wanted nothing to do with the pups. It was the beta male, Kiva, who fast became their father figure and protector.

Because of the structured nature of the wolf pack, the "parent" wolves are very protective of the puppies. As the first hours of their introduction passed, Kawoni and Kiva developed a relationship with the pups, bowing to them to entice

play and running with them. If one of the puppies strayed too far, Kawoni would round the pup up and put it back with its siblings. Kiva has become a terrific father. He will roll over and let the pups play on him. When the pups are asleep in a den, he will lie at the opening above ground to be sure they are not disturbed.

When volunteers walk around the outer fence, the pups will often walk along inside, with their new parents. The mid-ranking wolves have also been seen playing with the young ones. All of the wolves regurgitate to feed the pups. Nayehi is still not very fond of them, but they know who he is and know how to be submissive to him.

It took a lot of volunteers a lot of hours to prepare the puppies for their new home with this pack. The truest test of having done a great job is going to the park and seeing how happy the puppies are and how accepted they have become in their new family. They are now a perfect ten. ♦

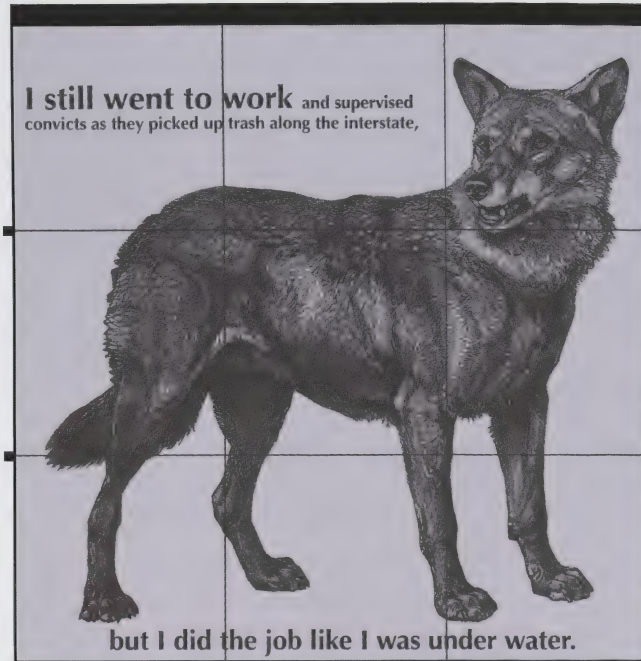
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Karen Travis lives in Kingsport, Tennessee. She holds a bachelor of arts in English from Carson-Newman College and a master's in education from East Tennessee State University. She spent the summer of 2007 volunteering as one of many proud puppy parents.



# THE RED WOLF

By JEFF KERR



I could hear his paws clattering on the weathered boards of the old dog pen.

"Well, come on and I'll show him to you," said Hooky Newcome, my buddy and owner of Hooky's Gas and Animal Garden.

I followed Hooky's humped back through the cool of the store. We went past shelves of dusty cans of motor oil, baskets of fireworks sold in bulk, jars of hard candy and cheap plaster statues of Indian maidens, Indian warriors, grizzly bears, and howling wolves. I let my hand graze the top of a glass case that displayed fossilized fish from when dinosaurs ruled the Breaks.

We went out the back screen door and walked past a well that held diamondback rattlers, rusting bird cages holding sickly ra-

vens and hawks with clipped wings. A skinny,

drunk looking goat with five legs strained at a rusty length of chain when he saw us.

"Back, Emmett, it ain't feeding time," Hooky said to the goat.

I looked through the wire fence of the dog pen and saw the smallish wolf with reddish fur. He paced the hot confine of the pen with his tongue hanging and his eyes going from me to Hooky with a calm suspicion. A plastic margarine container that had once held water was knocked over, the water making a dark shadow in the dirt of the pen.

"Well, I'll be damned if he ain't knocked that water dish over again," Hooky said, shaking his head at the ornery defiance of the red wolf.



I stared hard at the animal, his fur reddish like a fox. He was skinny and thick-boned, bigger than a large dog or a coyote. He wasn't like the wolves pictured on the cheap souvenir plates and statues back in the store.

"Looks kind of strange, Hooky. Sure that's a wolf you got in there?"

"Hell, yeah, I'm sure. It's one of them red wolves. My daddy used to tell me about killing them when he was young. Ain't so many now. Boy brought this one in after hitting it with his car comin' up from Elkhorn. Still kindly got a limp to him."

"Gonna keep him?" I asked, not taking my eyes from the pacing red wolf.

"That there red wolf is a sure enough money-making attraction. How many people laid eyes on a wolf in the flesh down here? Going to call him Cornbread Red. People will sure enough stop to see this son-of-a-gun, I know."

"He eatin' anything?" I asked.

"Dumped a can of dog food in there. Didn't touch a bite. Threw some cold hot dogs in there this morning. Ate every bite."

I nodded my head as we watched the red wolf pace the dog pen, every now and then giving us that look of calm suspicion as if he knew every inch of the insides of our thoughts.

"I got to take off. Got things to do," I said.

I moved away from the pen. I couldn't see the red wolf anymore, but the sound of the scratching of his paws against the wood stayed with me.

My house was what you would call unfinished. A work in progress. The skeleton of the addition was sealed off from the rest of the house with plastic tarps that raised up and shook whenever a wind came through. I lived in the kitchen and the living room. I peed in the yard or the kitchen sink if it was raining or I was too drunk to make it outside.

When my wife Roberta took my boy Dan, I lost interest in things. I still went to work and supervised the convicts as they picked up trash along the interstate, but I did the job like I was under water.

I sat on the loveseat looking down at a Time-Life history book on Indians. They had pictures of all the famous ones: Sitting Bull, Geronimo, Cochise. All of them staring defiantly back at the camera.

I took a good hit off the Jim Beam I was drinking straight up from one of Dan's Mighty Morphin Rangers glasses. I felt the burn of the bourbon as I stared back in the eyes of the dead Indians.

The cable TV was on, the sound a low hum to keep me company. I looked at the TV and it was a show all about Evel Knievel. I hadn't thought about him in years.

When I was a kid I wanted to be just like him. Now Evel Knievel had been shrunk down by hepatitis and unpaid taxes.

I poured some more Jim Beam and watched old footage of Evel as he sailed through the air in slow motion, past the stares of people as he went over a line of buses. They all wished they had what it took to do it. I watched the footage as he came down wrong on the ramp and cartwheeled like a doll flung by an angry giant. I just knew he was breaking bones as the motorcycle wobbled past him there, as he rolled on the ground in his red, white, and blue jumpsuit in front of all those people.

I shuddered and suddenly thought about the red wolf pacing the dog pen. I could see him clearly in my mind treading that pen in the darkness.

I turned off the TV and sat there with the glass of Jim Beam in my hand. I got up, put on my jacket, and went out to my truck. Before I knew it, I was driving the winding road toward the Breaks watching the yellow slashes of the highway in the headlights.

It was after eleven, so Hooky's was way past closed. A string of old Christmas tree



lights was stapled along the gutter of the store. The lights shone red and green, making weird shades of light on the parking lot gravel. I walked toward the Animal Garden and kept looking for signs of Hooky.

I turned on the flashlight. Its ghostly beam stared into the red wolf's eyes, making them shine like two bright quarters. I lowered the beam.

"Hey, wolf, hey. Don't be scared now," I said as I put the flashlight down on the ground. With a pair of bolt cutters, I broke the links of the chain on the gate of the pen.

The red wolf whined. I pulled the broken chain through the gate and let it fall to the ground with a cold rattle. I pulled

open the gate and stood behind it. The flashlight on the ground caught the red wolf's legs as they danced through the beam.

I held onto the gate, and in my mind I could see the red wolf lope across the highway and up the grassy incline toward the piney darkness of the Breaks.

I picked up the flashlight and held the beam on the open gate, then down at the broken length of chain on the ground. I knew my fingerprints were on everything and it would be just a matter of time before the blame fell on me hard. I didn't care. Those eyes had seen me, knew me, and carried me along with them in the hard run of a red wolf's memory. ♦

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Jeff Kerr writes and lives in Waukegan, Illinois. His roots go deep in Southeastern Kentucky and Southwestern Virginia. He is a 2006 Denny C. Plattner Award Winner for his short story, "The Miner's Friend."

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## That Year He Quit School

By JOHN CANTEY KNIGHT

When thirteen,  
he followed the baying pack  
into the chest-high cornstalks until  
in a circle, sweeping arms and claws  
churned the air. The stooped  
black shoulders and snarling snout  
twisted in a giant's roar.

Sounds erupted like the wrenching  
of Earth into chasms and peaks,  
or the tumbling of trees and rock.  
In the fierceness of carnivores  
teeth and claws slashed. Fur  
and blood meshed in a death's dance.  
His palms turned sweaty with excitement.

With a boy's fingers  
he inserted a cartridge in the breech  
to return to a world where dogs  
and bear defined survival  
as man hurled projectiles. A silence  
in the wake of the blast stopped  
in heartbeats bear, hounds and boy.

That year he quit school.  
He plowed the bottoms with his pap  
till death left him orphaned. Growing  
wiser, older, he listened for the dog's song.  
Solitary, hair and beard tangled,  
he roamed the enclosing mountains  
and hunted a time past.

John Cantey Knight met his wife of thirty-seven years at Young Harris Junior College in North Georgia. His plans on retirement are to return to the mountains and to continue to write.



# URSUS AMERICANUS: ADAPTING TO A WORLD LESS WILD

By SARAH THOMAS



Varmints. Raccoons in the corn, foxes in the henhouse, groundhogs in the pasture, opossums in the trash bin—bears in the birdfeeders? As I was growing up on a farm in central West Virginia, dealing with varmints was just another part of country life. Bothersome critters were often dispatched in one of several ways and then taken to Coleman Ware, who could skin them out and peg the hides to dry before you finished commenting on the weather. Coleman paid a fair price for hides and then sold them to a furrier in New York City.

Varmints were a simple problem, simply resolved in a way that resulted in a win-win situation for furrier, skinner, farmer, and live-

stock. The only loser was the varmint, and for many subsistence farmers it was a question of either the varmint eating or the family eating—an easy decision. But since when does the noble black bear fall into the varmint category?

*Ursus Americanus*—the American black bear—was once deemed a fearsome predator but is slowly being redefined as a “back-yard nuisance.” Here are just a few recent headlines from regional newspapers:

May 25, 2007, Asheville, N.C. — “Hungry Black Bear Drops by WNC Nature Center”

June 20, 2007, Gaffney, S.C. — “Black Bear Sightings . . . Not at all Uncommon”



June 23, 2007, Helen, Ga. – “Man Kills Bear with Log”

August 2, 2007, Roanoke, Va. – “Police, Game Officials Chase Bear”

August 3, 2007, Morganton, N.C. – “Unwelcome: Officials Remove Black Bear from Morganton Home”

August 31, 2007 – Charleston, W.V. – “Hungry Bears Running into Humans, Officials Warn Hikers, Hunters to Avoid Them”

September 5, 2007, Trenton, N.J. – “Panel Hunts for Solution to Black Bear Quandary”

September 5, 2007, Harlan, Ky. – “Black Bear Activity a Concern for City Officials”

September 6, 2007, Pittsburgh, Pa. – “Becoming Unbearable, the State’s Bear Population is at its Highest Level Ever, and Suburban Encounters are Increasing”

Bears, once encountered only occasionally in the forest and even more rarely in urban areas, are now seen roaming subdivisions, crossing highways, wandering through parking lots, and raiding trash cans, pet food containers, and bird feeders. Bear-related nuisance calls to departments of natural resources throughout Appalachia have skyrocketed in recent years.

The *Roanoke Times* reported a story in August 2007 of a bear first spotted at the Snappy Food Mart. The 140-pound female followed railroad tracks south to a post office on Rutherford Avenue in the city. Ultimately, officials tranquilized the bear behind a Norfolk Southern building. She is just one

of many black bears venturing out of the woods and into urban areas in search of food.

Bears, it would seem, are opportunistic feeders. Omnivores, their diet consists primarily of nuts, berries, plants, insects, and the occasional bit of carrion. However, if a more convenient food source appears, bears will take advantage. And what could be easier than a feeder full of sunflower seeds, a bowl of dog food, or food remnants left outside a house? Especially when a growing bear population and the occasional poor acorn harvest or late freeze make food in the forest more scarce.

Regional statistics demonstrate the growing black bear population:

Shenandoah National Park alone is today home to 5,000-6,000 black bears, this after the near elimination of the black bear from its boundaries in the early 1900s.

The South Carolina Department of Natural Resources received more than 250 calls concerning black bear encounters in 2006—up from twenty in 1990.

The North Carolina Department of Natural Resources places the 2004 statewide black bear population at 11,000 animals over 10 million acres—up from 4,000 bears on 2.5 million acres in 1971.

According to data from recreational sightings, hunter harvest, road kills, and Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries field staff, bears now occur in at least ninety-two of Virginia’s ninety-eight counties and cities.

Christopher Ryan, black bear project leader for the West Virginia Division of Natural Resources Wildlife Resources Section, said the bear population has definitely increased in the past ten years. “We have been receiving numerous calls concerning bear sightings from areas that have not had bears in the recent past. Bears have been reported in all fifty-five counties, and we have received many reports of sows with cubs in the northern and western portion of the state.”

My husband Jim and I had our first encounter with a nuisance bear late one night when we woke to the sound of wood thumping against metal. It was a bear raiding the birdfeeder hanging from an iron pole in the backyard. We crept to the window and saw a huge bear seated comfortably on the ground emptying two feeders not six feet from us.

The next morning we rehung the feeders and discovered that a third feeder for finches had disappeared. We began taking the feeders in at night. Clever, we thought, but not as clever as the black bear, who started coming earlier in the evening. We took the feeders in earlier. And he came earlier, until he was visiting in the middle of the afternoon.

The only solution for getting rid of a nuisance bear is to remove all food sources. If a nuisance bear is relocated and food sources are not removed, another bear will often move into the same territory.

People feeding bears is the number one problem as the human



population and the growing bear population continue to encroach upon one another. Feeding happens both intentionally and unintentionally. Many who live in bear territory simply don't realize that if there is food, bears will come. Trash bins, birdfeeders, and pet food left outside are the primary culprits, but bears have been known to invite themselves onto porches or inside houses through screens in pursuit of a tempting smell. Grills, compost piles, and beehives are also prime residential food sources for bears.

DNR offices all along the East Coast advocate the removal of all food sources. While unintentional feeding is the most common source for bears, some folks intentionally feed them in order to get a better look at the wild animals.

"It is understandable that some people will illegally set out food to get a glimpse of this magnificent animal," Ryan said. "However, too often these actions regrettably result in the death of the bear. Bears that wander near residential areas in search of food are less likely to stay if they do not find anything to eat."

The West Virginia DNR promotes the slogan, "A Fed Bear is a Dead Bear." It's actually illegal to feed bears in the state—as it is in New Jersey; Maryland; Gatlinburg, Tennessee; Kentucky; Virginia; and Florida among other places. The argument is that once a bear learns to rely on human food sources, it is much more likely to be hit by a car or killed outright—either in fear or because it has become a threat,

or more prone to disease and illness because of a poor diet.

An incident in Georgia in June 2007 is an extreme case of how contact with people can be detrimental to bears. When a black bear raided a family's campsite in the Chattahoochee National Forest, Chris Everhart, fearing for his family's



safety, hurled a stick of firewood at the bear and killed it. The bear had attempted to drag the family's cooler into the woods. Everhart was ticketed for failure to secure his campsite.

In 2006, Kentucky officials euthanized a bear after it had become accustomed to seeking food from people. The bear approached a resident of an apartment complex who was holding food. The bear, wearing a Global Positioning System collar, had been seen raiding dumpsters and had been captured and released at least twice—for raiding

beehives in 2001 and again in 2004 for pillaging Kingdom Come State Park garbage cans.

"In this instance, the bear approached an individual in an attempt to obtain food," said Steven Dobey, program coordinator for the Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources. "Ultimately, it was the assertive behaviors displayed by this bear and its persistent nature that concerned us the most. Although bears can become very tolerant of humans, they are wild animals and their actions can be unpredictable. When a 430-pound bear has been taught to associate people with food and shows little fear of humans, our management options are limited."

Although black bears are generally shy and not aggressive, misunderstanding and misrepresentation create fear among humans. While attacks have happened, they are rare. A common myth is that a mother black bear will attack in defense of her cubs. While this trait is true of Grizzly Bears, black bears tend to be more mild-mannered.

While different sources give varying totals for fatal attacks on humans by black bears, the consensus is that the number is less than sixty over the last century. Appalachian Bear Rescue gives the number as fifty-seven fatalities in North America in the last hundred years, while the North American Bear Center says fifty-six with less than twenty of those occurring in the contiguous United States.

There are over 750,000 black bears in North America. "One in a



million becomes a killer,” says Lynn Rogers, the center’s director.

One of those recent deaths hit close to home for residents of the Appalachian region. In April 2006 a black bear killed a six-year-old girl and mauled her mother and two-year-old brother at a campground in Tennessee. It was only the second documented black bear attack in the state’s history.

Bear-bluffing behavior is often mistaken for an attack. When they feel threatened, bears will sometimes rush forward and stop abruptly. They might also clack their teeth or slap the ground with their paws. People also become concerned when seeing a bear stand on its hind legs. This is simply a way for the bear to get a better view or sniff in order to satisfy its curiosity.

If you encounter a bear, don’t panic. Pick up any small children and restrain pets. If you see bluffing behavior, you’re too close and need

to move away. Don’t run. Instead, back away, slowly raising your arms so you look larger. Avoid direct eye contact, which can seem threatening. Talk in a calm, soothing voice. Retreat from the area and give the bear a wide berth. If a bear is treed, it likely feels afraid. Leave it alone and it will come down and leave once it feels secure.

“People are moving into bear country at an unprecedented rate, and their attitudes will determine the future of bears that live around them,” said Rogers, who has spent more than thirty-five years studying and even living with bears. “Sharing factual research information with the public is important, because the more people know, the more tolerant they become toward bears.”

Once the large male who first raided our bird feeders had moved on, we returned to the habit of feeding backyard birds. Then, in mid-summer, a small female bear took up where the male

had left off, proving that if there’s food, the bears will come. She’s a beautiful little bear who makes the rounds among our neighbors. Fortunately, they don’t seem to mind her. We worry, though, that she’s too accustomed to people and may suffer negative consequences.

In early September of 2007, she checked our empty feeders and then moved along the gravel drive toward the woods. Jim stepped out onto the deck for a better look, and she stopped and stood up on her hind legs. Jim was awestruck by her grace and beauty as she took a few steps back toward the house before dropping to all fours and loping away.

Bears may be falling into the “varmint” category these days, but if they are, it may be time to consider what role people, who have essentially invited the animals into their backyards, have played in the reclassification of *Ursus Americanus*. ❖

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Sarah Thomas is a native of French Creek, West Virginia, who now lives in Asheville, North Carolina, with her husband and three dogs. A public relations professional, she does freelance writing for several magazines and is director of development and public relations at the Presbyterian Home for Children in Black Mountain. She holds a B.A. degree in English from the University of South Carolina, Coastal Carolina College.



# THE POWER OF PRAYER

By MICHAEL CHITWOOD



All the way home, the single catfish the boy had caught bumped against his thigh with every step. The otherwise empty fish stringer jangled as it shook. The fish swung on the chain, a bell tolling in its silent way.

Once he got home, the boy, thorough in his apprenticeship to the crafts of the woodsman, began to gut the fish. He worked at a makeshift cleaning table, a sheet of plywood laid across two sawhorses. He always gutted his catch, even when he would only use fillets from the fish, to see what it had been feeding on. He kept a notebook, recording the type of fish, the season, and what seemed to have been its last meal—sometimes it was difficult to tell, but he always

tried to find out so he could use the information for bait selection in the future.

He worked carefully, trying to run the knife blade just under the skin so as not to nick any internal organs until he was ready. His patient grandfather was the boy's instructor, and the boy, a natural outdoorsman, was a quick study. He now only consulted his grandfather when a question arose.

The slick internal organs of the fish were hard to handle, but the boy soon found the stomach. Using just the tip of the knife blade, he made a slit. Such delicate work always brought the pink tip of the boy's tongue to the corner of his mouth. His fine black hair, usually swept to one side of his



forehead, fell forward. He bent so close to his work that the rounded end of his nose nearly touched the glistening fish.

Once he got the stomach opened, he took the full blade and began to rake the contents out onto the plywood. The fish contained an unidentifiable mush of gray-

green matter. And then the glint of the gold chain.

He slipped the knife blade under the part of the chain that had revealed itself and drew out of the goo a

delicate gold necklace with a small cross. The boy forgot his work with the fish and rushed inside his house to wash the chain and cross and restore them to their proper state of purity.

"What's it mean," the boy asked the older man, who kept his gaze on the windshield of the truck and the road beyond it. For a time, it seemed as if the man would not reply. He nodded his head as though silently answering a different question, one put to him by an unseen interlocutor. Then, still not taking his gaze from the road, he said, "We'll find out."

Pastor Ledbetter shook the man's hand and gripped his arm at the elbow with his free hand. Then he gave the boy's back two light thumps with his open palm as he brought the pair into his kitchen. There was a metal table with a red shiny top and on the table four white placemats with ruffles along the edges. Something about them reminded the boy of angels.

He felt too warm, seated now in the red vinyl kitchen chair. He did not want to put his hands on the white, frilly placemat for fear he might soil it. Instead, he rested them, clasped together damply, in his lap.

The man laid out the reason for their visit as Pastor Ledbetter listened, his hands

joined almost prayerfully atop the placemat. The pastor nodded nearly imperceptibly as the man told the story of the necklace's discovery and asked the minister to interpret what its unusual appearance might mean. Pastor Ledbetter's neck bulged in a roll above his collar and necktie. The boy had never seen him without a tie. Ledbetter was the only pastor the boy had ever known at the only church he had ever attended. Everyone the boy knew believed what Pastor Ledbetter said about the love of God and how it worked in their lives and how it could be called upon in times of need.

The boy had been told to pray. To pray daily, deeply, to understand the meaning of finding a necklace with a cross on it in the belly of a fish. It was clearly a message from God, the pastor had said, and the boy would have to go to the Lord in prayer and let His light reveal the purpose of the gift.

And so the boy prayed. He prayed almost unceasingly. He got up an hour earlier than his usual waking time and sat in the old school desk his grandfather had refinished for him. He shut his eyes and bowed his head so the fine black hair fell forward, and he asked God to reveal the meaning of His gift. At first, he had tried kneeling by his bed but found he could only last about ten minutes in that position on the hardwood floor. In the desk, he could wait for the entire hour for some divine response.

In the notebook where he kept his notations about fishing and hunting, he also began to keep a log of his time at prayer. Wednesday a.m.—1 hour and 12 minutes. Thursday, walking home from school—20 minutes.

The girl's name was Catherine, but in the third grade she had announced she wanted to be called Cat. She had straight blonde hair, parted in the middle, and it fell past her shoulders, a shimmering curtain from the back, which is how the boy often saw

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*He shut his eyes and bowed his head so the fine black hair fell forward, and he asked God to reveal the meaning of His gift.*

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her, sitting behind her in class. Whenever he had the occasion to speak to her directly, he noticed an odd sensation in his stomach. It was the same feeling he got when the car dipped suddenly in a low spot in the road.

Though it was not unusual for her name to come into his head, it had done so during his prayer time on the morning of the day he heard of her illness.

It was very serious, according to the message her parents sent to school. She would probably not return to the seventh grade for the rest of the year.

It was then that the boy knew the meaning of the gift the catfish had brought him. It would save Cat.

His grandfather drove him to the hospital, and the parents, touched by his gesture, allowed the boy to put the necklace on Cat as she lay listless in the bed. Her thin hands, normally quick as sparrows, were lifeless at her sides. She could barely raise her head enough for the boy to slip the chain on. It gathered her golden hair and held it close around her pale cheeks. She made no response when the boy whispered that he would pray she got better and the necklace would make sure of it.

The grandfather gave his head a quick sideways jerk, a motion he often used on hunts to signal it was time to go back to the truck. They both nodded to the parents and silently left. On the way to the parking lot, with his hand resting warmly on the boy's shoulder, the man said, "You gave it to her, you got to make it good."

The boy prayed harder and longer than he had before. After his mother had kissed his forehead and turned out the light, he rose and sat in the desk, petitioning God for Cat's good health to be returned. He had a rule that he could not repeat a phrase in a prayer during a 24-hour period. That way, he reasoned, his prayers would always be fresh to God's ear. And he used as many forms

of address for the Almighty as he could remember from Pastor Ledbetter's prayers in church. Lord. Blessed Father. Most Loving God. Eternal Strength. Giver of the Living Waters. Great Healer. Pastor Ledbetter always prayed for the sick during Sunday services and said the Lord was the most high physician, stronger than any medicine man could invent.

The boy made a list of the names in his notebook so he could consult it when memory failed him. The fish had come to him and him alone, and now Cat's life was in his hands.

The drugs they gave Cat made her hair fall out, it was reported at school. The boy would have liked to have some of it to use in his praying. He thought it might strengthen his pleas if he were able to hold a ribbon-tied bundle of the strands as he bargained for Cat's health. He asked his grandfather if he would take him back to the hospital so he could gather some of Cat's hair—to help in praying for her, he added, when his grandfather seemed displeased.

"Idolatry," his grandfather huffed and left the room.

The incident with the hair worried the boy. He wasn't exactly sure what idolatry meant, but he knew he had done something wrong. He feared he was praying wrong and that God was not answering his prayers because He wasn't hearing them. The boy always put his hands together, palm to palm, each finger matched to its mate on the opposite hand when he prayed, even in the cafeteria, though some students made fun of him. The proper form was important, just as it was in hunting and fishing. If you didn't hold your breath as you squeezed the trigger of the .22 rifle, you might miss the squirrel perched on the limb of the hickory. It was the same with prayer, with God, with Jesus His only son, with the Holy Ghost. He didn't really understand the Holy Ghost. He



got God the Father and Jesus His Son, but the Holy Ghost didn't make sense. Why a ghost, something you might not see, something maybe scary? Weren't ghosts souls that hadn't gone to heaven? Unhappy ones still too much in this world? He decided he shouldn't think about that because it might make God angry.

Cat did not get better. She was not returned to health. The Great I Am that I Am did not help her. The boy knew he was to blame. He had not prayed in the correct manner. Or had not prayed hard enough, long enough, deeply enough. The miraculous gift, a gift from a living creature, a creature that was the symbol of the Lord's only son, had been wasted. Wasted. The gift had come from the dark of the fish's belly and now, around Cat's neck, it would be returned to the dark of the grave. Pastor Ledbetter said the Lord answered the prayers of the true believer.

All Cat's classmates would attend the funeral, all but the boy. When he heard she had died, his mind and heart were flooded with the realization of his failure. He ran from the school. It took his parents

and Pastor Ledbetter well into the evening to find him out in the woods where he hunted. He was lying face down in the leaves, his arms over his head. He would not speak, and when they led him into his room, he began to rake things from the tops of dressers and tables. He sent pictures and trophies and books flying to the floor. His father held him, and Pastor Ledbetter spoke to him, but to the boy it sounded like the pastor was speaking a foreign tongue. It might have been the language Jesus spoke or the language Moses heard coming from the burning bush, but the boy could not understand it. To him, it sounded like a dog barking.

When the boy finally spoke, he said he didn't want to go to the funeral. And his parents, relieved that he had broken his silence, said he could stay home. So they went as did his grandfather and were not home to see him leave the house with his .22 rifle even though it wasn't hunting season, which didn't matter as he was not hunting creatures of this world. He was going out to find a ghost, which he did, far in the woods where he had so often been happy. ♦

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Michael Chitwood is the author of seven books, including *The Weave Room* and the recently released *From Whence*. His new collection of poems, *Spill*, was published in the fall of 2007. His work has appeared in *The New Republic*, *Threepenny Review*, *The Georgia Review*, *Field*, and numerous other publications. He teaches at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.



# SONG FOR A SALVE

By JANICE WILLIS BARNETT



Even in early morning sunlight, the hill-sides of this Madison County, North Carolina, farm have a blue-shadowed look about them. Having lived in these hills all fifty-nine years of his life, Analo Phillips is used to their brooding look. He is also used to being in his tobacco patch on a late summer day, laying an ax to the bright green stalks. But today has something else in store for him. He will be singing for a recording session in the living room of his own home.

Analo devotes much of his time to recovering and relearning the lyrics to some of the ballads, folk songs, and gospel songs he heard his parents, other relatives, and neighbors sing while he was growing up in the

Big Laurel community of Madison County. Digging into his musical roots has become a way to help him heal from pain caused by the loss of loved ones.

In 2003, within a six-month period, Analo lost the three people who had been at the center of his family, work, and social life: his father, his mother, and an uncle who lived nearby. His mother died as a result of a heart condition. Four months later, his father succumbed to cancer after entering Hospice care; his uncle died a few weeks later. Prior to their deaths, Analo cared for all three elderly relatives with the help of his only sibling, a sister who lives in another part of North Carolina. "Before they went into the

*The cabin Analo built on the family property.  
Photo courtesy Janice Willis Barnett.*



hospital, I carried them through the house from room to room, and when they ate I fed them," he says.

Analo has always been devoted to his family. "When I was younger, I didn't see enough income in my future to support a wife and children, so I never married,"

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*"The songs Analo sings are the saddest songs on earth, but they are healing him."*

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he says. "I grew up around older people. My grandmother lived near the house here, and I helped take care of her. I always felt like my family needed me to survive, so I stayed

around to help them out. We never had that much company. We mostly just stayed here by ourselves."

After his mother died and he discovered that his father had cancer, Analo's grief was so severe he ceased operating his sawmill and building log homes on contract as he had done for years. He barely had enough energy to do his farm work. Recognizing that he was severely depressed, a nurse at the Hospice center that cared for his father requested that Hospice chaplain and grief counselor Janie Franklin work with him. She sensed that it would help Analo to be with other people and began inviting him to her home to eat and visit. She knew about Analo's singing at his father's burial and asked him to sing for her family. Later, her family encouraged him to sing at their church.

"The songs Analo sings are the saddest songs on earth," Franklin says. "But they are healing him."

Recording engineer Don Eanes has hauled his recording equipment across the mountain from Johnson City, Tennessee, and has already transformed Analo's living room into a portable studio. A computer and various recording paraphernalia rest on the metal top of an oil stove sitting in the middle of the room. One of Analo's straight-

backed chairs sits in front of a microphone waiting for him to take a seat and begin singing in the room where his mother's white lace curtains still hang from the windows and family pictures cover the walls.

Analo's father, John Phillips, peers from one of the pictures as if he is watching the proceedings. He, too, had a recording session in this room, and Analo still has the records. "My daddy probably knew a hundred songs," Analo says. "The problem is I can't remember all the words to them. So I've been digging back in my memory and in old hymnbooks and songbooks of his to find the words I don't know. One night I was digging through my dad's things looking for songs, and I found some old 78 RPM records he made sometime around 1955. A cousin of his came here with a record maker one night, and they made a couple of records just for the fun of it. It has 'Pretty Polly' and 'John Henry' on it and a couple of Jimmy Rodgers' tunes he'd heard on the radio.

"The Marshall radio station was built about the same time that my dad made the record. That was back when the station had a show on Saturday evening where people could go play music and sing on the air. My dad would go play guitar and sing. A lot of people drank in order to have the nerve to get on the air, and the manager was afraid somebody would say a dirty word or do something that would get the station shut down. So he stopped the show.

"But my dad and my uncles and my grandpa still got together here at the house once a month and played guitar and banjo and fiddle, and they would sing the old songs. I just listened. I never did learn to play an instrument."

Analo's father didn't want him to become a musician. "My dad thought that if I traveled around making music at places where there was a lot of drinking that I would become a drunkard. He said I was



too valuable to him to let me get out and be destroyed. I was needed too much here at home to let that happen. It wasn't that my dad minded me singing. We all sang. Our singing usually took place while we were out working. A lot of the time, we would sing by ourselves. My mother knew a lot of songs she would sing while she was out hoeing or milking, but she wouldn't sing in front of people.

"I never did sing in public with my dad. We worked together in the fields or at my sawmill about every day, squirrel hunted together, dug ginseng, and sometimes we would sing to one another as we worked."

Analo's first time singing in public was for the father who didn't want him to become a musician. But John Phillips was no longer with him except in spirit. As his father's body was being laid to rest in a small mountain cemetery near their home, Analo sang almost without realizing what he was doing:

"There ain't no grave gonna hold my body down.

When you hear that trumpet sound  
Gonna get up out of the ground.

There ain't no grave gonna hold my body down."

As Analo prepares to record this traditional gospel song called "Ain't No Grave," he shuffles through his notes, then closes his eyes and sings without looking at the lyrics. His voice is mournful and haunting—a voice that has sung a lot about death since that day on the mountain when he sang for his father.

Without the Hospice chaplain's help, Analo admits he might have become a recluse after losing his family. "I would have stayed in my seclusion more if it hadn't been for her. She was kind of like a horse, you know, that sets its nose in a man's back and nudges him along. I wouldn't have confi-

dence in my singing, and she would tell me I was my own worst critic. That I could sing. She had me sing at her church, and then these other churches started inviting me to sing."

Analo laughs about his early performances. "I think people came to hear me because they couldn't believe that odd Phillips boy from the head of Long Branch was getting out. If you stay at home all your life, people start thinking you're backward. Hearing me sing at all these churches, people can't understand how I've overcome my odd ways in such a short time."

Analo has a technique he still uses if he is nervous while singing in front of an audience. "I close my eyes the way the old ballad singers did so I can concentrate better."

After three years of "digging" into his memory and old songbooks, Analo has rediscovered the lyrics to nearly a hundred ballads and gospel songs. Though some of the ballads are among those that British folklorist Cecil Sharp collected in Madison County in 1916, Analo doesn't limit himself to singing only songs from the traditional canon as defined by Sharp and other folklorists.

When it comes to "style" and "speed" Analo sticks to the drawn-out, plaintive sound of the old ballad tradition he remembers. "I try to carry the tone of my voice and the holding and the timing the way the old folks did, the way that some old man would sing at dusk dark after working all day, tired from hoeing corn or putting up hay. He



*Analo recording a song in the home he shared with his parents.  
Photo courtesy Janice Willis Barnett.*



would sing his song from the heart, and it would be slow and lonesome.”

Two older men in particular influenced Analo’s singing style: his father and Silvan Shelton, a neighbor. “I heard Silvan sing ‘Ain’t No Grave’ and ‘Wayfaring Stranger’ and songs like that when I was just a little boy. He must have been in his seventies then. Every May 30, he would walk about eight miles through the mountains to the decoration at the Shelton cemetery and the cemetery up from our place and then walk eight miles back home. You could hear his voice a mile away. I try to sing the way he did and the way my dad did.”

When Analo first began singing for audiences, he sang a cappella and doubted that he could ever sing with musical accompaniment. That has changed. “I’ve been singing with these boys that wanted to get a little group together to sing and play music in churches. Most of the time I start singing the song and they pace the music to my voice. With some songs like ‘Wayfaring Stranger,’ the guitar player will start, then I’ll sing a verse or two, and the fiddle player will come in then.”

Analo sang a couple of ballads at the 2005 Bascom Lamar Lunsford “Minstrel of Appalachia” Festival at Mars Hill College. His voice attracted the attention of Rob Roberts, a University of North Carolina graduate student making a documentary about the continuation of the ballad tradition in Madison County.

As the recording session in his living room ends, Analo rummages about the house looking for pictures to use on the cover of a forthcoming compact disc. He asks the recording engineer what he thinks about using a picture of him with his Belgian mules on the cover. Would a shot of his tobacco patch work for the back cover? How would the song titles look against all that green?

Before Don Eanes leaves to head back to Tennessee, Analo invites him to attend a singing at a nearby church. “The musicians I was telling you about will be there,” he says. “They might want you to record us while they play for me.”

Clearly, the man who is healing himself by singing the “saddest songs in the world” is looking toward the future. ♦

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# JIMMY MARTIN: TOO WILD FOR THE OPRY

By WAYNE WINKLER



The Grand Ole Opry has often been unkind to the wild men who have graced its stage. Hank Williams' drinking and drug abuse led to his firing just a few months before he died in 1953. When Elvis Presley brought his R&B-inspired gyrations to the stage of the Ryman Auditorium, the Opry manager told him to go back to driving a truck. But Jimmy Martin—the widely-acknowledged “King of Bluegrass” and the man who created hits like “Sophronie,” “Hit Parade of Love,” and “Widow Maker”—was never invited to be a member of the Grand Ole Opry. And sadly, Martin's reputation for wildness sometimes threatens to overshadow his legacy as one of the most innovative pioneers in bluegrass music.

When asked about his banishment from the Opry, Jimmy often wryly replied that he

wasn't good enough to be a member. At other times, he would blame individuals, particularly his former boss and mentor Bill Monroe, for keeping

him off the Opry. But many agree with the assessment of bluegrass musician and promoter Tim White, who commented, “The man who kept Jimmy Martin off the Opry was Jimmy Martin.” Doyle Lawson, who played with Martin, agreed: “Jimmy was probably his own worst enemy.”

“He didn't get on the Opry because Jimmy was like Jimmy was,” says White. “They were afraid of him—afraid of what he might do or what he might say. But if he wasn't like he was, he wouldn't have been Jimmy Martin.”

James Henry Martin was born in 1927 in Sneedville, Tennessee. Like thousands of Americans, he regularly listened to the



Grand Ole Opry broadcasts from Nashville. As he learned to play the guitar, he dreamed of one day performing on the stage of the Ryman Auditorium with his voice beaming out across the country on radio waves. In the fall of 1949, he made his first step toward country music stardom.

"I was paintin' machinery in a factory in Morristown, Tennessee," Martin recalled, "and I was playin' on WCRK from 4:30 to 5 every evening. I got fired on my job for singin' too much, and I cussed out the foreman for firin' me. When I went back after my clothes, I seen him on the street and told him, 'Listen in on Saturday night, 'cause I'm singin' with Bill Monroe on the Grand Ole Opry.'" Jimmy Martin never lacked confidence.

Bill Monroe and his Bluegrass Boys had introduced the hard-driving sound of bluegrass to country music a few years earlier. His band had featured vocalist/guitarist Lester Flatt and a banjo player with a unique three-finger style named Earl Scruggs. Flatt and Scruggs left Monroe in 1948 to form their own band, and Mac Wiseman, who was now filling the lead vocal slot, wanted to move on to a solo career. Jimmy Martin had picked a good time to visit Bill Monroe backstage at the Opry. After listening to Martin sing with a borrowed guitar, Monroe told Martin to pack his bags and get ready to hit the road.

Many consider Jimmy Martin the best vocalist ever to sing with Monroe. They recorded some outstanding songs together, including

"New Muleskinner Blues," "I'm On My Way to the Old Home," "Uncle Pen," and "Little Girl and the Dreadful Snake." Martin's singing inspired Monroe to raise the pitch on some of his classic songs, and the combination of Martin's lead vocals backed by Monroe's tenor defined what would become known as the "high lonesome sound."

But there was tension in the relationship; Martin was somewhat high-strung and temperamental and was not the type to take a secondary role onstage. A video clip of him performing with Monroe and the Bluegrass Boys shows Martin bopping, dancing, and kicking his leg in contrast to the other musicians who are relatively frozen in place. For his part, Martin resented the low pay Monroe offered his musicians. "When it came time to get paid," Martin once recalled, "Bill would ask, 'How much can you get by on this week, Jimmy?' I was havin' trouble making it there."

Martin eventually teamed up with mandolin player Bobby Osborne. They played on the *Farm and Fun Time* on Bristol's WCYB radio in 1951. "We stayed there for a while," Martin told Tim White in an interview, "and, you know, it was hard to make a living. We played just percentage shows and WCYB didn't pay us anything to play on the radio station—we just played there to plug our show dates. I left there and joined ol' Cas Walker down in Knoxville." Walker, a grocer who hosted a local morning television program, featured country music and gave early exposure

to a number of performers, including Dolly Parton. "He paid us very poorly too, but at least we made enough to eat on." Then Bobby Osborne went into the Marine Corps and Martin moved to Ohio to work with Bobby's banjo-playing brother Sonny, then fourteen years old.

After another brief stint with Bill Monroe, Martin returned to Ohio where he worked with another teenaged banjo wizard, J. D. Crowe. Meanwhile, Bobby Osborne (newly discharged from the Marines) and his brother Sonny were in Knoxville. "They were working for Cas [Walker]," Martin recalled, "and I knew what kind of money they were making, when they could get show dates. We started talking about getting together." Then Casey Clark, the MC of the *Lazy Ranch Barn Dance* on Detroit's WJR radio, called with a job offer. "When we played the auditorium for Casey, there was about 150 people in the audience. They hadn't heard nothing like what we were doing. We tore the house down."

Detroit was ripe for some good down-home bluegrass; during and after World War II, the city was filled with expatriate Southerners who had moved north for well-paying factory jobs. Many of Jimmy Martin's relatives lived in or near Detroit, including his cousin from Sneedville, Willis Winkler, who was also my father. Jimmy visited the house sometimes and brought a bit of showbiz glamour to our home. He was building quite a name for himself, especially after Casey Clark began broadcasting his *Jamboree* on



CKLW-TV from Windsor, Ontario, just across the river from Detroit.

Martin and the Osbornes perfected their three-part harmony singing with Jimmy on lead, Sonny on baritone, and Bobby on tenor. While playing with Bill Monroe, Martin had been offered contracts with RCA, Columbia, and Decca Records, and had later recorded a few songs for Cincinnati-based King Records. Now that he had a band that sounded the way he thought they should sound, he contacted RCA. In November of 1954, Martin and the Osbornes, along with Cedric Rainwater on bass and Red Taylor on fiddle, recorded six songs, including "Save It! Save It!" and "20-20 Vision."

"When we went in to record, we knew what to do," said Martin. "We were really rehearsed. My guitar, Bobby's mandolin, and Sonny's banjo were all on the same microphone. . . . When Bob would come in and take a break, Sonny knew just how to back him up and I knew just how hard to hit my guitar. Each of us knew when to hit it hard and when to hit it soft. That way the man who cut the records wouldn't have much to do 'cause we'd already mixed it for him."

"Save It! Save It!" and "20-20 Vision" were successful, but that didn't mean Jimmy and the Osbornes were rolling in money; Sonny's wife Pat and Jimmy's wife Barbara had to take jobs to help support their families, leaving the men to take care of their sons during the day and rehearse or work show dates at night. They worked

in the Midwest and Canada to appreciative audiences, but by 1957 the Osbornes were ready to leave. It wasn't an amicable parting and hard feelings persisted between them. The Osbornes moved to Wheeling, West Virginia, and then on to Nashville and the Grand Ole Opry. Martin stayed in Detroit and before long he had a mandolin-banjo team



that suited him: Paul Williams from Wythe County, Virginia, and the still-teenaged J.D. Crowe from Kentucky.

Martin and the Sunny Mountain Boys were offered a regular spot on the *Louisiana Hayride* program originating from 50,000-watt WKXH in Shreveport. The *Hayride* reflected a broader musical taste than the Grand Ole Opry and had provided a welcome to Hank Williams and Elvis Presley when the Opry wanted no part of them. Martin's contract with RCA was not renewed after his split with the Osbornes, so in Feb-

ruary of 1958 he brought his band into the studio for Decca Records.

J. D. Crowe recalled, "When we went into the studio there was no rehearsing. We had it all worked out. We'd run over it with the studio musicians. Usually we'd do this stuff in one or two takes. Martin knew exactly what he wanted."

One of the songs recorded during that session was "Rock Hearts," which was Martin's first song to hit the Billboard charts, reaching number fourteen on the list. Later in 1958, Jimmy Martin and the Sunny Mountain Boys recorded more classic numbers, including "Hold Whatcha Got," "Bear Tracks," and "Cripple Creek." Constant rehearsal kept the band sharp, and the group practiced vocal harmonies as they drove from date to date. Martin prohibited alcohol use by band members during working hours, and, according to Crowe, didn't drink on the job himself. Later, Martin developed a reputation for drinking which sometimes got out of hand.

In 1959, Martin and the band moved on to the *Wheeling Jamboree* on WWVA in Wheeling, West Virginia. This was a very productive time for Martin, and many who have worked with him consider this period to be his best. Martin began to tinker with the traditional bluegrass sound on his recordings to make them sound fuller, like the other records coming out of Nashville. "It seemed that whenever they played bluegrass on the radio, the volume always dropped down," Martin said. "I wanted my



records to be loud like the other records. I wanted it to stand out."

To accomplish this, Jimmy introduced a snare drum in his recordings in 1960. Later, he would introduce elements such as a female voice singing high baritone along with the male singers' three-part harmonies. These innovations were always wedded to rock-solid bluegrass, anchored by Martin's trademark "G-run" on the guitar.

He remained a perfectionist in the studio. Doyle Lawson (who, like Martin, had lived in Sneedville) played with Martin in the early 1960s and again in the 1970s. "Jimmy knew exactly what he wanted with his music. It was cut-and-dried; it was not, 'Well, that'll do.' He knew what he wanted and he expected you to play what he was hearing [in his mind]. Of course, he was already established by that time; he was at the top of his form. He had a formula that was working, and he expected anyone who came into the band to play Jimmy Martin's music."

Material was also important to Martin, and he was attracted to songs outside the bluegrass field. "I tried to be different in bluegrass, and I tried to pick out good songs," he told one interviewer. "[The record producers would] play me a tape and I'd say, 'Right here is a real good bluegrass song. You just give that to Bill Monroe or Jim & Jesse, and see if they'll record it, because I don't think it's a good-worded song. Gimme one of them songs ol' Marty Robbins is gonna record, and they'll say it's bluegrass, time I get

done with it. There ain't a George Jones song I couldn't sing, but they'd call it bluegrass. Take 'Picture of Me Without You'—that's plain bluegrass if I ever heard it. That's a Jimmy Martin song. Hank Williams' songs is perfect bluegrass songs."

Martin's first long-playing album was released in May of 1960. The title of the album came from pro-

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*"I hear Jimmy's doing real well up there. If he moves to Nashville, I'll do everything in my power against him."*

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ducer Owen Bradley's question to Martin: "What are we going to call this?" Martin replied, "I don't care, just as long as you call it something good and country." *Good and Country* became not only his first album title; it also became the marketing slogan used by Decca Records. The word "bluegrass" never appeared in the title of one of Martin's albums.

At the end of 1962, Martin, along with Barbara and their boys, Tim and Ray, and most of the Sunny Mountain Boys, moved to Nashville, the center of the country music business and home of the Grand Ole Opry. Later, Martin told an interviewer that his old boss, Bill Monroe, had told Barbara, "I'd advise you to stay [in Wheeling]. I hear Jimmy's doing real well up there. If he moves to Nashville, I'll do everything in my power against him." A few years earlier, Monroe had circulated a petition to keep

Flatt and Scruggs off the Opry and no one had signed it, so it is doubtful Monroe had the ability to keep Martin off the show. Nonetheless, Martin always blamed Monroe, at least in part, for keeping him from becoming an Opry member. And despite his growing popularity, he found it difficult to get bookings on the Opry.

His Opry appearances were successful, but Martin's aggressive personality and tendency to tell people exactly what was on his mind (especially after a few drinks) alienated some who might have helped him. "It got to where I couldn't even get on there anymore," he later reflected. "I musta hurt somebody's feelin's, didn't I? I'm not sayin' it braggin'. I just thank the Good Lord that I could walk on the Grand Ole Opry and tear it up. They did promise me that I would be a member. Then it got down to I couldn't even guest on there—and me encorin' and goin' over big. Now I don't know if I sounded all that good or if the audience felt sorry for me."

During the 1960s, Martin scored several hits—"Widow Maker," "I'm Just an Old Standby," "Freeborn Man," and novelties such as "Guitar Pickin' President" (penned by an up-and-coming songwriter, Tom T. Hall) and "I Can't Quit Cigarettes." Martin enjoyed novelty songs. "I like to see [the audience] slapping their hands and enjoying and laughing, a smile on their faces. I like to see people dance and pat their hands. It takes a novelty to do that. A man can't be sad all the time. If he does, he'll get out and shoot himself.



He's got to be happy. The novelty songs do that." Martin would later contribute stories and vocals to *The Possum Tapes* and *Chicken Pickin'* by the VW Boys.

Life was turbulent in the Martin household. Jimmy and Barbara now had four children—Lisa and Buddy were born after the family moved to Nashville—but Barbara frequently left the home for awhile or had Jimmy arrested. By the end of the 1960s, Barbara had left for good, leaving Jimmy to raise the children at their home in Hermitage, just outside Nashville. In 1988, Martin married Theresa Sutherland from Pennsylvania, but that marriage didn't last either.

Decca Records became MCA in 1970, and Martin's output began to slow; he recorded only twenty-one songs for the label between 1970 and 1974. However, in 1972, Martin appeared on the Nitty Gritty Dirt Band's seminal album *Will the Circle Be Unbroken*. The album brought veteran performers such as Martin, Roy Acuff, Maybelle Carter, Earl Scruggs, and Doc Watson together with relative newcomers like Norman Blake and Earl Scruggs' sons Randy, Gary, and Steve. The three-record set introduced a generation of urban rock listeners to the sounds of bluegrass and traditional country music and secured Martin's status as one of the old masters of the music.

In 1974, MCA dropped many veteran country performers from the label, including Ernest Tubb, Loretta Lynn, and Jimmy Martin. After half a dozen releases on the

Gusto label, Martin formed his own Sunny Mountain Records. He had made some good investments and was able to live comfortably while devoting more of his time to hunting than to performing. His status as a pioneer in bluegrass was secure, yet the Grand Ole Opry never relented in its determination to keep him from becoming a member.

In 1999, writer Tom Piazza released his book *True Adventures with the King of Bluegrass*, based on a weekend he'd spent with Martin for a magazine article. Piazza recognized Martin's unique talent, but his admiration was overshadowed by his account of Martin's misadventures backstage at the Opry, where, fueled by whiskey, he squabbled with Ricky Skaggs and threatened to kill Bill Anderson. This type of publicity did not endear Martin to the Opry.

Doyle Lawson, who now leads his own band, Quicksilver, says Martin was hurt by the Opry's rejection. "He loved the Grand Ole Opry; he never lost that passion for it. I think some of the things that were said or happened were simply out of frustration. . . . I worked the Grand Ole Opry with Jimmy and when he hit the stage, he had that crowd wrapped around his finger. They loved it—he knocked 'em dead."

Tim White of the VW Boys believes Martin took a degree of pleasure in his exclusion from the Opry. "I think he knew the reason he wasn't on the Opry and I think it tickled him. If he'd had his rathers, he'd rather have been on the Opry.

But he actually, at some point, resigned himself [to the idea that] 'I'll never be on the Opry, so in that case, I'll just rub it in their faces a little bit.' That's the way Jimmy was and I loved him for it."

The final cut on the VW Boys' *Chicken Pickin'* features a hair-raising yodel by Martin, followed by his invitation to come back to visit him at his home. "I'll do the [yodel] again here in my kitchen for ya, but I can't do it backstage at the Grand Ole Opry, I'll tell ya that right now." When White protests, "Aw, they'll let you in," Jimmy replies, "Hell no, I can't go backstage at the Opry no more, 'cause I can do that stuff and they can't do it!" There was no mistaking the note of pride and defiance in his voice.

In 2004, Martin learned he had bladder cancer. He died on Saturday, May 14, 2005, and was buried in Spring Hill Cemetery in Nashville, under a tombstone he had designed himself and installed years earlier.

In the summer of 2007, Tom T. Hall released a CD of songs co-written with his wife entitled *Tom T. Hall Sings Miss Dixie and Tom T.* The final cut on the disc is "Jimmy Martin's Life Story," a song which covers the highlights of his life and career and features yodeling from Martin. Doyle Lawson has recorded a CD of Martin's gospel songs with Martin's former Sunny Mountain Boys, Paul Williams and J. D. Crowe. Recent documentaries such as *High Lonesome* and *King of Bluegrass* have introduced many listeners to Mar-



tin's music and reminded others of the place Martin carved out for himself in country music. Jimmy Martin's legacy lives on despite the reluctance of the Opry to acknowledge it. Given the blandness

of today's corporate country music, Jimmy might have even taken a bit of pride in the knowledge that he was too wild, too outspoken, and far too real for the Grand Ole Opry. ❖

#### Author's Note

Some interview material was taken from Chris Skinner's notes to the Bear Family Records collection *Jimmy Martin and the Sunny Mountain Boys*. Other material came from an article by Skip Hardin.

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## Green Snake

By BILL BROWN

|                                                                                                         |                                                                                                         |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| At willow pond<br>a rough green snake,<br>gentlest of animals,                                          | not with boom boxes<br>the Internet and casinos<br>to make them American.                               |
| blends in perfectly,<br>wound like a bracelet<br>on an outstretched limb.                               | The little people know<br>it's good not to exist—<br>buried in a book of legends                        |
| Lumped with hoppers,<br>it awaits sunlight<br>to dapple the leaves.                                     | and small passages of novels.<br>The green snake watches them pass,<br>sticks out its tongue a welcome. |
| No Eden here,<br>no allegory with an apple,<br>just a farm pond,                                        | Something Magic,<br>like a crow feather,<br>is left under an oak root                                   |
| stocked with bream and catfish,<br>home of sliders and bullfrogs<br>that the little people pass through | where deeper still a brood<br>of mink are nursing—<br>reminders of the Hopewell,                        |
| before going under the mountain.<br>Young Cherokee don't believe<br>in them any more,                   | the stone-box sun worshippers,<br>the mound builders—that 15,000<br>years is a speck of dust.           |

Bill Brown lectures part-time at Peabody College of Vanderbilt University. His work has appeared in *Appalachian Heritage*, *Appalachian Journal*, *ALCA-lines*, *Clinch Mountain Review*, *Iron Mountain Review*, and *Now & Then*.



# THE APPALACHIAN ROOTS OF ROCK AND ROLL

By ROB RUSSELL



Rock and roll has always been a primal, unschooled, uncouth musical form. Its iconic imagery communicates the wildness at its core: Elvis in his two-tone jacket and baggy trousers, pivoting his hips, a guitar whipping around his waist; Jerry Lee, mop of hair flopping in time as he pummels a piano in a demonic frenzy. This wildness is often attributed to the influence of deep Southern blues on white rock-and-roll singers, but two characters whose creations helped define the wild identity of rock-and-roll at its inception have Southern Appalachian roots. Born (we think) a year apart and growing up only forty miles from one another, Roy Hall and Stick McGhee were responsible for two seminal moments in the development of rock-and-roll music: arguably the first “rock-and-roll” recording—McGhee’s “Drinkin’ Wine Spo-Dee-O-Dee”—and Hall’s co-writ-

ing of “Whole Lotta Shakin’ Goin’ On.”

Details of the early life of Granville “Stick” McGhee (or “Sticks” as he was credited on many recordings) are sketchy, but according to biographies of his more famous older brother, bluesman Walter “Brownie” McGhee, Stick was born in Knoxville, Tennessee, in 1917 or 1918, or in Kingsport in 1923. Most sources agree that Stick grew up on a small family farm near Kingsport, and it was there that he earned his horrifically literal nickname by pushing his then polio-stricken older brother around town in a cart with a stick. His father, George Duffield “Duff” McGhee, was a farmer who played guitar and sang, and his sons often went along with him when he performed at churches, barns, and bars. Guitarist Brownie left home in the early 1930s to pursue the life of an itinerant musician, hooking up most notably with harmonica player Sonny



Terry. They became a famous blues duo, performing and recording regularly until the early 1980s.

After a stint in the Army during World War II, Stick joined his brother in New York City in the mid-1940s, performing in various Harlem nightclubs. "Drinkin' Wine" was first recorded on the independent Harlem Records label in 1947. That first, pre-rock-and-roll version features Stick on guitar and vocal with Brownie on guitar and helping out vocally on the chorus. The recording was not a hit, but the tune caught the ears of Ahmet Ertegun, whose struggling new jazz and blues label, Atlantic, was looking for a song that could be a popular hit. The story goes that he solicited the already successful Brownie to do a cover version of the record, which put him in touch with the song's original writer and vocalist, brother Stick.

On the 1947 version, the instruments are two acoustic guitars, the vocal delivery straightforward. The overall feel is upbeat, almost rushed. The 1949 re-recording for Atlantic again features Stick on vocals and Brownie on guitar, but from the starting notes this is clearly a whole new thing. Maybe it's the sounds of the city they've begun to call home, or the influence of playing louder in the rough-and-ready nightclubs of Harlem, but this time the song distinctly rocks—the piano pumps, the drums drive, the guitar is gritty and higher in the mix. The tempo is slower this time, but stronger: This is not just a record to drink and dance to but one containing the es-

sentia element that separates rock-and-roll from jump blues and its other predecessors—a rhythm that more obviously parallels the movements of sex. Especially in the choruses, Stick's vocal delivery is similar to that of contemporary blues shouter Wynonie Harris (whose 1948 recording of "Good Rockin' Tonight" is another contender for "first rock-and-roll record"). The lyrics are slightly different. New Orleans is now the scene of the tune's debauchery, which only serves to emphasize the song's hedonistic message:

Drinking that mess, their delight  
When they gets drunk, start

fighting all night  
Knocking down windows and

tearin' out doors  
Drinkin' half a gallon and callin'

for more  
Drinkin' wine spo-dee-O-dee,

drinkin' wine (bop baa)  
Wine spo-dee-O-dee, drinkin'

wine (bop baa)  
Wine spo-dee-O-dee, drinkin'

wine (bop baa)  
Pass that bottle to me  
Drink that slop!

That's what I'm talkin' about!  
Ah, drink it! Sneaky Pete!

Now down on Rampart Street  
at Willy's Den

He wasn't selling but a little gin  
One cat wanted a bottle of

wine  
He hit that cat for a dollar and

a dime  
Stick McGhee continued to re-

cord for Atlantic through the early

1950s and also cut sides for Cincinnati's King and Essex labels in the last part of the decade. Either because of the success of "Drinkin' Wine" or his natural proclivities, most of his best work has drinking as its central theme, with titles like "Jungle Juice" and "Whiskey, Women and Loaded Dice." His career was cut short by lung cancer in 1961, and he was buried in the Bronx.

The success of "Drinkin' Wine" and its influence cannot be overestimated. It provided fledgling Atlantic Records with its first big hit, and artists like Ray Charles, Aretha Franklin, and Led Zeppelin could very well have been ignored entirely without the success of the song. It placed Ertegun in a position to keep taking chances on great music that often defied boundaries and created new genres. The tune itself became a standard of the early rock-and-roll repertoire, recorded by all of McGhee's major contemporaries: Lionel Hampton, Wynonie Harris, the Johnny Burnette Trio. It has been recorded by artists as diverse as Electric Flag, Jerry Lee Lewis, and Kid Rock, the reigning "wild man" of rock (and rap).

While most of the details of Stick McGhee's life have been lost to history, the life story of another rock-and-roll pioneer with regional roots is so chock-full of details that it is difficult to separate the truth from the (often self-created) legend. James Faye "Roy" Hall was born in Big Stone Gap, Virginia, in 1922, just forty miles north of the McGhee family farm in Kingsport. He took



the name Roy Hall in the mid-1940s when he joined the Hall Brothers, an unrelated touring outfit who'd lost a brother named Roy prior to James Faye joining the group. Roy kept the name as his professional moniker for most of his career. He was an experienced pianist, and an alcoholic, by his late teens. Some sources claim he was tutored in his piano and drinking skills by a black itinerant pianist, and Hall himself cited albino boogie-woogie pianist Piano Red (a.k.a. Willie Perryman, a.k.a. Doctor Feelgood) as a major influence. But in some of Roy's later interviews, he revealed that his first piano lessons were given by his mother, who played at home and in church and expected young James Faye to do the same.

Roy led a Hank Williams-style country group, the Cohutta Mountain Boys, who recorded a few sides for the Detroit-based Fortune label, including the Hall-penned "Dirty Boogie" in 1949. After experiencing some jukebox and live success in the Midwest and serving as country crooner Tennessee Ernie Ford's backing band for a short while, Roy and the band relocated to Nashville. From 1952 to 1954, Hall scraped by, playing backing gigs and working as a booking agent. He supposedly booked both Elvis Presley, whom he described as "no damn good," and Jerry Lee Lewis at a juke joint called The Musician's Hideaway, before signing on as country singer Webb Pierce's pianist and road

manager. Pierce was able to procure several solo deals for Hall, including one with Decca in 1955, where he recorded the first version of "Whole Lotta Shakin' Goin' On."

The single was not a hit, and neither were subsequent versions by Big Maybelle or The Commodores (the 1950s version—not Lionel Ritchie's band). It was only after Jerry Lee Lewis and Sun Records producer Jack Clement radically rearranged the tune in 1957 that it became a hit and Lewis's signature song. Jerry Lee's propulsive piano gave it a furious boogie-woogie beat, and his salacious delivery of the streamlined lyrics left no one doubting exactly what kind of shakin' was going on.

"Well I said come over baby/ we got chicken in the barn/Whose barn?/What barn?/My barn/Come over baby well, we got the bull by the horns/We ain't fakin'/Whole lotta shakin' goin' on."

Hall initially claimed sole writing credit for "Whole Lotta Shakin'," saying later that he'd written the tune while on vacation in Europe under the pseudonym "Sunny David." Songwriter Dave Williams (a Kentuckian with Native American and African American roots) also claimed credit for the tune, and another source states that Williams and Hall wrote the tune together on a hunting trip to the Everglades. Legally, Williams eventually established sole writing credit, but the song is often still

attributed to "Dave Williams and Sunny David," and Hall's story (or stories) are given substantial authority by many music historians, especially based on the fact that Lewis's performances of the song, and relationship with Hall, predated the Decca sessions, and he credited it to Hall. Either way, Hall never earned much from Jerry Lee Lewis's smash hit 1957 version, or any of the song's numerous cover versions. His ex-wife was awarded all of his royalties from "Whole Lotta Shakin'" by court order in 1958.

Roy Hall continued to write and record on his own, and with Pierce, through the end of the 1960s. In the late 1970s he was rediscovered by a new generation of rock-and-roll and rockabilly fans and after almost a decade of retirement found himself on stage and recording once again, before his death in 1983.

Stick McGhee and Roy Hall found their small shares of success, and their places in rock-and-roll history, far away from their Southern Appalachian homes. One was the son of a guitar-toting African American farmer. The other was a middle-class white boy from coal-mining country tutored at the piano bench by his pious mother. Both were unsuspecting architects of the wildest form of twentieth-century music. ♦

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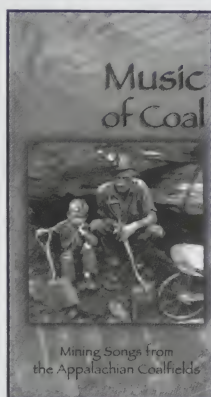
Educator by day and rocker by night, Rob Russell is the director of the Writing and Communication Center at East Tennessee State University and leader of Rob Russell and the Sore Losers. He's shared festival and club stages with blues legends like Koko Taylor and John Mayall as well as country and Americana acts like Gillian Welch, Keith Urban, and Scott Miller.



## Music of Coal

(Lonesome Pine Records)

Various Artists



To get right to the point, this is the most important Appalachian musical release in recent memory. And it wasn't produced by a big multinational record company but by a community group in the heart of Southern Appalachia.

Produced by the Lonesome Pine Office on Youth in Big Stone Gap, Virginia, under the direction of Paul Kuczko, *Music of Coal* consists of two compact discs and forty-eight songs covering various aspects of life in the bituminous coal camps and towns of Southern Appalachia. While past collections have focused on particular facets of coal mining life—disasters, unionization, health problems—producer Jack Wright and his team have created a comprehensive look at mining in the Appalachian coalfields.

The disasters are here: Charlie Maggard's "Explosion at Derby Mine" and Jean Richie's "West Virginia Mine Disaster" (sung brilliantly by eleven-year-old Molly Slemple). The labor songs are here, too, including Sarah Ogan Gunning's "That Twenty-Five Cents You Paid," Reel World String Band's rendition of Gunning's "Come All You Coal Miners," Richie's "Blue Diamond Mines," Ron Short's "Redneck War," Blue Highway's "Union Man," and Natalie Merchant's re-

make of the 1947 Florence Reece classic "Which Side Are You On?" There are even a few hits, including "Coal Miner's Boogie," from 1949 by "The Singing Miner," George Davis, and three Merle Travis songs, "Dark As a Dungeon" (sung by Travis), "Loadin' Coal" (sung by John Hutchison), and "Sixteen Tons" (sung by Ned Beatty, who began his acting career touring coal camps with the Barter Theatre).

But producer Jack Wright and the production team responsible for *Music of Coal* wanted to present more than just one or two aspects of mining this region's bituminous coal. "We were going for a comprehensive look at the Appalachian coalfields—to the exclusion of some work in the anthracite fields and also the coalfields out west." Indeed, the particular conditions of coal mining in Appalachia were often at the heart of Appalachian music, and *Music of Coal* demonstrates just how varied Appalachian music truly is.

Jim Price and Alan Maggard have done a remarkable job in restoring older material to fit the overall sound of the collection, much of which was recorded recently in Maggard's studio. An excerpt from a cylinder recording of the Edison Concert Band in 1908, "Down in a Coal Mine," opens the set. This was the first coal-mining ballad recorded in America, but it was written by English music hall composer J. B. Geoghegan, born in the Lancashire coalfields. This selection, along with vintage recordings by Trixie Smith ("Mining Camp Blues"), the Carter

Family ("Coal Miner's Blues"), and others is given just the right amount of digital treatment to improve clarity without sacrificing the feeling of the original discs.

The performers are a mix of coalfield-native and more famous names. Often these two categories overlapped. "I wanted to use as many regional people as I could, but I also wanted to use some nationally-known artists to help get people's attention," says Wright. "For instance, Dwight Yoakum, from Pike County, Kentucky, wrote a song about his grandfather, who was a miner in Pike County. So I was very interested in that song, not only because he was Dwight Yoakum and had a big name in country music, but the song really went to the heart of what we are trying to talk about, in terms of a miner's life and losing two brothers in the mines."

The varied musical styles are representative of the musical diversity of Appalachia, ranging from the traditional sounds of the Carter Family and Dock Boggs ("Prayer of a Miner's Child") to the more modern styles of W. V. Hill ("Dyin' to Make a Livin'") and Darrell Scott ("You'll Never Leave Harlan Alive"). Along the way, listeners are treated to a variety of musical expressions: early blues, gospel, union songs, bluegrass, and rockabilly.

Practically everyone involved with *Music of Coal* has ties to the coal industry and to the culture and lifestyle that spawned the music. "These people have connections to these songs, personal connec-



tions," asserts assistant producer Ron Short. "The singers are the children and grandchildren of coal miners, or have been coal miners themselves. They know firsthand that experience. And that story has not been fully told by history because poor people don't have access to the presses. But they do have access to a three-minute song."

The relationship between coal mine operators and the men (and particularly in recent years, women) who work underground has often been hostile, even violent. The cause in the early years was low pay; later, health and safety issues came to the forefront. The trials and hazards of mining life are amply reflected in songs like Aunt Molly Jackson's "Hard Times in Coleman's Mine," "Dark as a Dungeon," "Explosion at Derby Mine," A. J. Roach's "Black Lung," and "Fountain Filled with Blood" by a former miner, Elder James Caudill of Mount Olivet Old Regular Baptist Church in Blackey, Kentucky, accompanied by the Evangelistic Choralaires of Big Stone Gap.

Union struggles are recounted in songs like "Coal Black Mining Blues" by former union organizer Nimrod Workman, "Come All You Coal Miners," "Union Man," and "Redneck War," Ron Short's telling of the Battle of Blair Mountain, in which coal operators dropped bombs from airplanes on striking West Virginia miners, who wore red bandannas around their necks to identify each other in the heat of battle. And "The Yablonski Murders" from Hazel Dickens recounts a

dark chapter in union history when Jock Yablonski, an unsuccessful reform candidate for the presidency of the United Mine Workers, was shot along with his family in their home on New Year's Eve, 1969.

Unfortunately, images of union battles or, more recently, grief-stricken families at yet another mine disaster, are all most Americans know of the industry that provides over half our electricity or the people who work in the mines. "Whenever you see pictures on TV of families standing at the mouth of a mine, you know it's a disaster," says Short. "That's the only time miners ever get on TV. So we've come to be seen as victims, people who are caught in cycles we can't seem to break out of. I wanted there to be another look at the face of coal mining, about the triumph of families, about making choices, and about bringing the images into the twenty-first century."

*Music of Coal* provides alternative glimpses of life in the coalfields: Gene Carpenter's boasting tribute to his profession, "Roof Boltin' Daddy," Randall Hylton's ode to the joys of "Coal Town Saturday Night," and Tom T. Hall's "I'm a Coal Mining Man," about an industry which "make[s] America's economy roll." More than half the songs on the second disc are relatively new; though coal mining isn't the dominant industry it once was, it still has a powerful hold on the imaginations of the region's songwriters.

Darrell Scott's powerful song "You'll Never Leave Harlan Alive" was a hit for Brad Paisley and Patty

Loveless (two other singers with ties to coal country). The song is a somewhat dramatized version of Scott's family history. Darrell's father refused to mine coal, instead moving his family to the Midwest and finally to California. But the mines continued to occupy a central place in the family mythology and in Darrell Scott's consciousness.

Of special note is Suzanne Mumpower-Johnson's "Coal Dust Kisses." "There's a lot of love in coal-mining families, and that song nearly brings me to tears every time I hear it," says Wright. Short agrees: "I get chills just thinking about it. This is a portrait of a coal-mining family we haven't seen before." The granddaughter of a miner, Mumpower-Johnson describes the love within a mining family as seen through the eyes of a child who never knows of the hard times but recalls "coal dust kisses all the time." At the end of the song, her father is reduced to "A hundred pounds on a six-foot frame. . . . It's a losing battle with that old black lung." But "of all the memories we ever made / My favorite one will always be / coal dust kisses he would leave."

Black lung is a theme that shows up several times in *Music of Coal*. Now a minister in Indiana, the Reverend Joe Freeman, the son of a southwest Virginia miner, worked in the mines for two weeks himself and refused to go back. Freeman's "There'll be no Black Lung in Heaven" is presented with a spoken recitation recalling his father's disease. A. J. Roach of Scott County, Virginia, recalls the "black lung" checks received by his grand-



mother: "For forty years without your husband, a few hundred dollars. For forty years without your brother, a few hundred dollars. For forty years without your father, a few hundred dollars. . . . It made me angry." That anger can be heard in Roach's "Black Lung." Anger is at the heart of many of these songs, along with wounded pride and a dignity that shines through the music like the beacon on a miner's helmet.

The production team, including Wright, Short, Rich Kirby, and executive producer Paul Kuczko, sifted through 160 songs to choose the

ones that made the CD set. Then they put together a remarkable sixty-nine-page book of notes covering each song, along with photographs and additional information providing a social history of Southern Appalachian coal mining. The notes were written by Wright with research help from Darlene Wilson, Jennie Noakes, and Suzanne Savell.

*Music of Coal* is dedicated to Archie Green, the folklorist who first brought attention to the vast array of coal-mining songs with his book *Only A Miner*. Green himself writes in the notes, "Coal miners have shared

a twin destiny—to violate Mother Earth by constant digging; to supply fellow humans with needed energy. Much of the tension in mine songs springs from such duality."

The forty-eight songs on the two compact discs qualify *Music of Coal* for inclusion in any collection of Appalachian music. With the extensive and scholarly notes, this set should be added to every school library in Appalachia. ♦

Wayne Winkler is director of public radio station WETS-FM on the campus of East Tennessee State University and is the music editor of *Now & Then*.

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## Snake Canes for Sale

By CHARLES A. SWANSON

*those who hate thee have  
raised their heads, they lay crafty  
plans against thy people  
—Psalm 83: 2-3, RSV*

friends bring the craftsman  
tree and vine, stock to whittle  
a woodburnt stubble

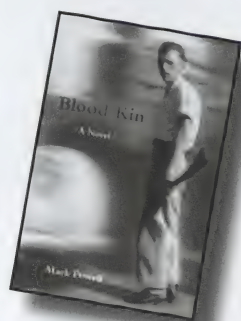
of crosshatch coils up  
under his tools slits appear  
eyes unblinking wink

each Virginia snake  
writhes to new incarnation  
tempting me to buy

but hand on canehead  
snake's tongue a finger away  
surely I'll stumble

Charles Swanson's poetry and short fiction have appeared in *Virginia Writing*, *Wildlife in North Carolina*, *ALCA-lines*, *Appalachian Heritage*, *Appalachian Journal*, and *Now & Then*. He won the 2005 James Still Award for Poetry, sponsored by the Appalachian Writers Association. He teaches English and creative writing at Gretna High School, Gretna, Virginia, and is the pastor of a Baptist church in Danville.





### ***Blood Kin: A Novel***

**By Mark Powell**

University of Tennessee Press

Knoxville, Tennessee, 2006

\$32.00 (hardcover), 237 pages

Mark Powell's novel *Blood Kin*, winner of the Peter Taylor Prize for the Novel, accomplishes the most essential task of a work of fiction: It draws the reader inexorably into its world. Powell's sinuous sentences recreate the mountain region of South Carolina in the 1970s and the suffering of the deeply damaged Burden family. Stories of self-destructing Southern families are not new, but Powell writes his version with conviction, artistic integrity, and admirable style.

Indeed, Powell writes so well that you can pull passages of transcendent clarity from the book almost at random. This example captures both sweeping landscape and small gestures:

"Enis left the Foothills Diner and headed up Highway 28 past Deadman's Curve and the turnoff for Isaqueena Falls, before veering onto 107. The evening sky was hazy with heat shimmering up off the blacktop, the road lined and sometimes hooded with mountain laurel and oak. Here and there twin

gutted tracks disappeared from the road at right angles: loggers cutting their way through Sumter National Forest. A car passed. The driver raised his hand. Enis raised a single finger. Everything slow. Weighted."

There is a lot of driving in this novel, up and down, back and forth, on winding mountain highways and up tracks into coves and hollows. The need to keep moving and go fast is balanced by the repetitiveness of where people go—the same highways, the repeated passing of Deadman's Curve. This is the texture of the lives of the men in the novel.

One feels from the beginning, from the very title, that the story will end in violence. The Burden men are overwhelmed by war memories, by drugs, by inertia. James has been addicted to morphine since he got back from Korea, and Roy drinks constantly and has narrowed his life to pursuing a relationship with a woman who wants out but is as addicted to him as he is to her.

All of the Burden boys have been part of wars, and their father, a preacher, has suffered something perhaps worse, which is the trauma of a father who committed monstrous crimes. The youngest brother, Enis, the least wild and suffering (his war was spent behind the lines), appears to be the only one likely to live out an ordinary life. Ordinary life, however—regular work, respect in the community, compassion for others—is treated with some ambivalence. Sheriff Elcott represents that kind of ordinariness, but it is not a

truly possible option for James, Roy, or their father.

There are other characters in the novel, including a crazy bereft farmer, an itinerant false preacher, and a boy studying at his knee. These passages lighten the tone and show off Powell's ability to write wry humor, but he saves his most powerful passages for the Burden men and their ruined lives.

The older brothers are drowning even in their efforts to understand what they are experiencing: "He ain't dying' [Roy said of his father], but softer this time unable to lance whatever bubble was growing within him. Beneath it, he knew, was love, patience, a deep reserve of kindness, but he found no path, no relief, so he sat suspended between emotions."

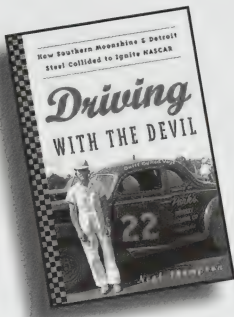
Roy, who was an ace pilot in Vietnam, is in many ways the quintessential wild Southern boy, aging rapidly, but still young enough to be passionate and to fight, if blindly and mistakenly, for what has meaning to him. There are touching passages where Roy seeks his beloved's odor, nuzzling her neck, pressing his face into the bed clothes after she has left the bed. Cooler and more hopeless is the older brother James, who was a prisoner of war in Korea and is now a drifter and morphine addict. He makes a desultory effort to reach out to his mother, to his wife, but there is little hope that he'll succeed.

This novel, then, is at its heart an elegy for the psychologically war-wounded, for all the constricted



and suffering wild boys who can't depend on youth anymore. The inevitable explosion is heralded loudly from the beginning, but this dramatic predetermination is not what is best in the novel. What makes *Blood Kin* worthwhile is the love the author feels for his damaged characters and their place. ♦

Meredith Sue Willis was the featured writer in the Fall 2006 issue of *Appalachian Heritage*. Her most recent novel with an Appalachian theme is *Oradell at Sea* from West Virginia University Press.



### ***Driving with the Devil: Southern Moonshine, Detroit Wheels, and the Birth of NASCAR***

By Neal Thompson

Crown Publishers

New York, New York, 2006

\$25.00 (hardcover), 411 pages

While much has been written on the history of stock car racing, Neil Thompson has taken a slightly different tact. Many of the sport's early pioneers are well known to long-time fans. However, little has been written about some of the equally influential but lesser-known characters. Most aficionados know Bill France founded the National Association of Stock Car Automobile

Racing (NASCAR), but not as much is known about the roles played by even more colorful men such as Raymond Parks, Lloyd Seay, Roy Hall, Red Vogt, and Red Byron.

Although NASCAR presents itself as a "squeaky clean" family sport, history reveals more unsavory roots. Thompson admirably presents many details true students of the sport have known. Even so, those who have followed the sport from its inception will learn more about its early period, including pre-NASCAR years in the 1930s and 1940s. Much of the stereotypical perception of stock car racing's growth from "good ol' boys running 'shine" in the hills of Southern Appalachia is somewhat apocryphal. Thompson has obviously given serious effort to separating fact from fiction.

Thompson chronicles Raymond Parks' parlaying his involvement in bootlegging into becoming one of the sport's first major successful car owners. As Parks' journey unfolds, the reader learns many NASCAR-shielded details of the manufacturing and distribution of illegal whiskey and its role in the early history of stock car racing. For example, readers learn of early driver Roy Hall's astounding on- and off-track exploits, often resulting in periods of incarceration. The tale is also told of Lloyd Seay, another driver, who was shot and killed by a cousin in a dispute involving the purchase of a relatively large amount of sugar, an important ingredient in the production of moonshine.

While the book is well researched and well written, it contains some factual errors, most relatively minor. For example, Darlington Raceway, which opened in 1950, is included as one of the "major stock car race-tracks of the 1930s and 1940s."

Thompson states, "Average attendance at a NASCAR Nextel Cup race is nearly 200,000." However, only Indianapolis Motor Speedway seats over 200,000. Thompson also writes that the "Southern 500" race, held at Darlington, was later renamed the "Rebel 500," even though they were two separate events. Dale Earnhardt is mentioned as being one of the "legends of the 1960s and '70s" in spite of the fact that his rookie season in NASCAR's highest level was 1979. While hardcore fans may take exception, these inaccuracies are generally understandable in a work of such magnitude by an author who has been introduced relatively recently to the sport.

Stock car racing is currently one of the most popular spectator sports in the nation, second only to professional football. However, few of today's fans are well versed in its true history, especially in light of the version presented by the sport's largest sponsoring organization. Thompson's entertaining and informative *Driving with the Devil* can at least partially fill that knowledge gap about the true roots of stock car racing. ♦

Don Good, a native of North Carolina, is professor of education and mathematics at Milligan College in East Tennessee. He attended his first race in 1964 and is a season ticket holder to Bristol Motor Speedway.





### **Lake Effect**

**By Laura Treacy Bentley**

*Bird Dog Publishing*

*Huron, Ohio, 2006*

*\$14.00 (paper), 108 pages*

Taking her epigraph from the poet Hashin, “No sky / no earth—but still / snowflakes fall,” Laura Treacy Bentley sets the tone for her collection, *Lake Effect*. The “lake” may be literal, oceanic, even geologic in the forms of molten lava or tar hardened into coal. The broad title leads to visions with varying degrees of focus.

The haiku as epigraph opens our understanding of theme and form in Bentley’s work. Rain, snow, and waves of water carry us through geographic and seasonal distances, showing the connectedness of continents and people. Three major divisions suggest the global nature of life, yet reiterate the isolation that is universal.

The connection between the Maryland mountains and the Irish countryside appears frequently. In “Late Fire,” W. B. Yeats has passed his vision of passion to an American poet, Larry Levis, now dead. In “Camden Park,” Emmylou Harris sings to miners’ souls at a county fair: “Their eyes draw in her song

like scripture. / It is bread and water. Body and blood.” In “Dissonance,” the poet sits in a Dublin pub, listening as “Mary [Mary Black, Celtic singer] sings of a woman’s heart. . . . while Paula [Paula Meehan, Irish poet who celebrates her working class heritage] reads her witching poetry.”

In “Sibylline” Bentley defines the poet’s role: “I speak in tongues. . . . / sketching the unknown with a cattail sparkler / singeing phosphorescent veins / on the palm of the night.” Other poems, such as “Camille’s Reply to the Sculptor,” speak to the strength of women in a culture that assigns them passive roles. Camille Claudel voices confidence in her art in spite of the greater fame of her “poet brother” and the “able hands” of her lover, Rodin. Yet, she says of her own work, “The waltz / plays on.”

Nature’s power soothes and terrifies. The poem “Geography” describes a soldier who witnessed the Gulf Coast chaos of hurricane Camille and found it “almost a relief to be sent to Vietnam, / . . . To fly away from the devastation and death.”

“For Clair” describes a writer, safe from the blurring rain, protected like fragile blue china while “A window holds the stormy Atlantic and craggy cliffs . . . .” Several taut poems reveal humankind as responsible for nature’s tragedies. In “Over the Mountain,” a bear, controlled and collared, is lured to his own potential destruction by the odor of barbecue. Hiding, he

sees “racing cars and down-shifting semi’s / with sinister glow-in-the-dark eyes.”

One of Bentley’s finest poems, “legacy,” debunks masculine self-delusion in perceiving hunting as a symbol of noble manhood. The poem opens with the author’s sighting: “pulling at the seam of the water / a wounded stag swims the length of the lake . . . and sails into the thicket.” In contrast, she spots several men:

“mangy hunters . . .  
in the mineral spring  
fully loaded: Wild Turkey Old  
Crow  
the water blood temperature . . .  
the drink liquefies their deeds”

Recognizing the cycle, the poet adds:

new hunters are waiting to be  
born  
they bob in amniotic cells  
memorizing muffled stories  
of the hunt and the hunted  
the hot scent of blood. . . .  
Fists clenched  
eyes fused shut

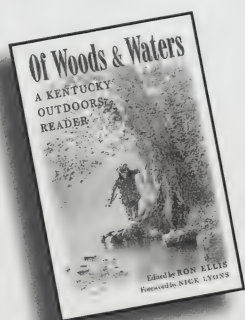
This poem, like many others, reflects Bentley’s incorporation of haiku elements such as traditional haiku punctuation. Sometimes the ellipsis seems to weaken the poet’s voice or detract from the overall effect; her extensive use of enjambment to give the flow of water imagery and the caesura to impose the pause, as seen in the preceding lines, seems stronger. She wields the dou-



ble entendre and word play as weapons of satirical humor. Her use of haiku language conventions—seasonal references, sparse lines, strong images—results in powerful poems. She is largely a poet of imagery and syllabication, which provide a sense of the poet's control over her material. Often allusive and sometimes esoteric, moving from intellectualized distance to warm memory, her subject and technique render representation difficult in a collection of ninety-three pages. Yet a lover of poetry, of aesthetics and craftsmanship, and of the Appalachian-Celtic connection, should take the time to sort out strong individual favorites.



Joyce Compton Brown is professor emeritus of English at Gardner-Webb University in North Carolina.



***Of Woods & Waters: A Kentucky Outdoors Reader***  
 Edited by Ron Ellis

*The University of Kentucky Press*  
 Lexington, Kentucky, 2005  
 \$29.95 (hardcover), 389 pages

*Of Woods & Waters* takes its title, fittingly, from Jim Wayne Miller's *His First, Best Country*, when the narrator realizes, "He'd lived for woods and waters in those days

[of his youth], he and his buddies, passionate hunters and fishermen." Through the work of editor Ron Ellis, this collection takes readers on the many journeys of hunters and fishers, hikers and campers, all of them searching, like Miller's narrator, for the "miracle that was a squirrel or pheasant, its perfect, sleek wildness, [that] had never failed to amaze him, awe him into a more perfect worship of the woods."

As Ellis outlines in the introduction, *Of Woods & Waters* is "a collection of some of the best writing by Kentuckians about their outdoor experiences." He organizes the book by genre, starting with nonfiction, which makes up the bulk of the book, moving to fiction, and ending with poetry. Nick Lyons provides a fine foreword to, as he calls this book, "an earthy and eclectic cornucopia."

There is much in this anthology to praise. Take the artwork on the cover and throughout the book, especially Rick Hill's pen-and-ink drawings and Harlan Hubbard's woodcuts. These artistic works complement the written art, and the editor has superbly placed them. Probably the best example is a wonderful drawing of a bluegill on the same page of Richard Taylor's poem, "Bluegills."

Ellis has ferreted out some fine writing as well, including two historical pieces, one by "Col. Daniel Boon" himself, and another by John James Audubon, wherein he describes fishing for catfish on the Ohio by means of a trotline. Fishing as a subject floats to the surface

of this book often, and even for a non-fisher like me, the best pieces enlighten and evoke appreciation, like Soc Clay's tribute to Muskie Joe, a legendary fisherman; Leatha Kendrick's beautiful poem "Fishing with My Father"; or John Wilson's "Old Reels," on the Kentucky inventors of our modern reel.

Hunting is also a main theme throughout, as represented by Harry Caudill's essay "The Frontier," Harriette Arnow's excerpt from *Hunter's Horn*, and James Baker Hall's poem "Hawkbells," on hooding a falcon: "pull / the knot tight / with your teeth / a smile maybe or / threat even a kiss. . . ." The hunt in its many forms leads readers to that "more perfect worship of the woods."

But all is not perfect with this collection. At times, the editor needs to be more wolf-like, circling the elk herd, looking for the weak, culling what won't make it through a winter of criticism. Too many pieces fail to shine as brightly as Robert Penn Warren's "Heart of Autumn." I wanted more of his words, of his "fierce impulse / To unwordable utterances. . . ." and much less of the romanticism and rambling of the weaker pieces.

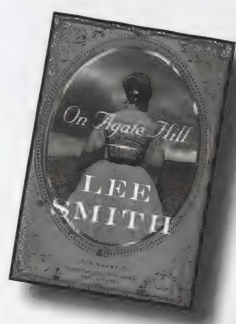
Another weakness is the lack of other famous Kentucky voices. Where, for instance, is the grandpapa of many contemporary Appalachian writers, Gurney Norman? Where too is fiction writer Chris Holbrook or the Affrilachians Frank X. Walker and Crystal Wilkinson or Kentucky poets Davis McCombs and Maurice Manning? All these



Kentucky writers have poems and stories grounded in the earth that would have fit well in this anthology.

Still, there is much to be praised in this book, such as Barbara Kingsolver's childhood memory: "I can't imagine that any discovery I ever make, in the rest of my life, will give me the same electric thrill I felt when I first found little righteous Jack in his crimson-curtained pulpit poking up from the base of a rotted log." *Of Woods & Waters* will be a treasure to all those who have gone outside and experienced this "electric thrill." ♦

Jim Minick teaches at Radford University.



### ***On Agate Hill***

**By Lee Smith**

Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill  
Chapel Hill, North Carolina, 2006  
\$24.95 (hardcover), 363 pages

Set in North Carolina from Reconstruction to the 1920s, Lee Smith's novel *On Agate Hill* is the tale of orphaned Molly Petree. Molly's story, from age thirteen until her death, is told through diary entries, letters, and court documents, framed by modern letters from Tuscany Miller, a graduate student, to her advisor.

The book offers many gems, as Lee Smith has perhaps the best ear of any living writer. Her Molly Petree writes, "I am like the ruby-throated hummingbird that comes again and again to [Aunt] Fannies [sic] rosebush but lights down never for good and all, always flying on . . . . I was born before the Surrender and dragged from pillar to post as Mamma always said until we fetched up here in North Carolina after Columbia fell."

Through Molly's eyes we see the collapse of the Old South, symbolized by the deaths of her family members. We see the illness and death of her anti-secessionist uncle, symbolizing the futility of idealism during Reconstruction.

Friendship with Mary White Worthington rescues Molly from her loneliness. At this point, after Molly's aunt tells her she has a soul whether or not she wants it, Molly writes, "I don't want to be an angel any more than I want to be a ghost girl. I want to be a real girl and live as hard as I can in this world."

Mary White leaves and Molly is sent to boarding school. At that point, the narrative is advanced by letters from a teacher to the headmistress and entries in the headmistress's diary. The book is still thematically connected by the isolation and futility of women's lives, but Molly's voice is lost.

Molly moves to the Appalachian Mountains, where she finds purpose as a teacher and true love with a man who becomes both her husband and the "demon lover" of her childhood dreams. Molly

is accused of murdering her husband, and Smith introduces court transcripts and the voices of Appalachian folk. Yet the scenario has the feel of a plot device instead of a natural development.

Molly returns to Agate Hill to live with her late benefactor's servant and her late uncle's son. While she seems content, the conclusion doesn't hold the reader's interest.

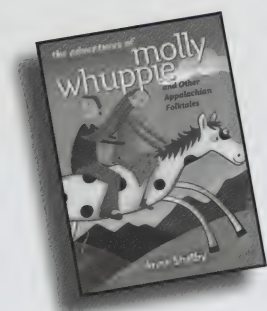
Graduate student Tuscany Miller's modern letters lack the richness of Molly's diary entries, but there are amusing passages: "I did not see [Molly's] grave because they were having the Member/Guest Tournament on the day I went out there, and the cemetery is right in the middle of the fairway on the 7th hole."

Smith's themes hold *On Agate Hill* together. We enjoy Molly's maturation, suffer the death of the Old South and struggles of the New, and follow Molly's movement from coastal Charleston to the North Carolina Piedmont and on to the Appalachian Mountains.

Readers will remember the gems of Molly's childhood and the themes that hold the novel together. *On Agate Hill* is a book well worth reading. ♦

M. Katherine Grimes is associate professor and coordinator of the English program at Ferrum College in Virginia.





***The Adventures of Molly Whuppie and Other Appalachian Folktales***

By Anne Shelby

The University of North Carolina Press  
Chapel Hill, North Carolina, 2007  
\$14.95 (cloth), 96 pages

Molly Whuppie is a rare character among folktales: a woman whose wit and cunning equal the male prowess of Prince Charming, Jack, or even the epic hero Ulysses. Though Molly has existed for centuries, she has not enjoyed the good press of her more retiring peers, such as Cinderella, Snow White, or Rapunzel, who were content to wait for handsome princes to extricate them from abuse and imprisonment. Molly is a take-charge woman. Her character represents the best in all humanity, not just women—kindness, common sense, courage, generosity, and cunning.

In *The Adventures of Molly Whuppie and Other Appalachian Folktales*, Anne Shelby has done Molly proud. This collection of fourteen stories is inspired by and adapted from Leonard Roberts' well-known collections of eastern Kentucky folktales. In her concluding essay "About the Stories," Shelby says, "I loved the language in Roberts' tales. . . . In a way, reading the tales

was like going home." But Shelby was concerned that "Female characters tend to play much more passive roles. The tales' gender stereotyping seemed anachronistic, and it was not something I was interested in passing on." So she began the search for tales whose main characters are strong women. She found Molly in Joseph Jacobs' *English Fairy Tales* (1890) and her Appalachian kinswomen (Muncimeg, Mutsmag, and Merrywise) in tales collected by Roberts, Richard Chase, and others.

Then Shelby did what any good storyteller does. She melded the folktale characters, plots, and motifs with her personal vision and voice. In the tradition of Doug Larche's *Father Gander* (1995), Virginia Hamilton's *Her Stories* (1995), and Jack Zipes' *Don't Bet on the Prince* (1986), Shelby reshapes the old tales to give us not necessarily a modern woman but a woman whom twenty-first-century readers can applaud—and, more importantly, model. Shelby also rids the stories of the negative qualities that some readers find odious, such as violence, gruesome deaths, and sexism.

Not all of the stories feature Molly. "Runaway Cornbread" and "Pig Tale" belong to the tradition of cumulative tales, and "Jack and the Christmas Beans" is Shelby's own invention. In all of the tales, however, Shelby is true to her purpose. She has delivered admirable role models and thoughtful stories in an exquisite narrative style that is as comfortable and "homey" as Leon-

ard Roberts' language, which she so admired. Be it a casual declaration ("Why Lord, yes!") or a blunt confrontation with the Bossy Untidy Ogre ("I believe you've got my sisters here, sir."), the voices ring true, especially Molly's.

These fourteen tales are valuable in and of themselves, but Shelby's concluding essay and bibliography make this volume particularly suitable for the classroom. It can be used as a casebook on the evolution of folk motifs, especially if combined with resources such as the "Mutsmag" pages on the AppLit website, hosted by Ferrum College: <http://www.ferrum.edu/applit/bibs/tales/mutsmag.htm>.

If you were to meet Molly Whuppie in the check-out line at the Wal-Mart, you might not immediately know her, but should a nasty giant appear in aisle seven, Molly would abandon her buggy on the spot and dispatch him with aplomb. And then you would say, "I recognize that woman. I see in her all the strong Appalachian women I have ever known." We need more women like Molly and more writers like Shelby, who is not only a good storyteller but also a good scholar. Her narrative voice helps us "know" Molly, and her scholarship helps us value the folktale tradition and its living legacy. ♦

Robertta Herrin is director of the Center for Appalachian Studies and Services at East Tennessee State University.



# BRIGHT HOPE

By FRED SAUCEMAN



**W**e climb into my father's creaking red Chevrolet pickup just about dark, headed for somebody's farm I could never find again, to hunt frogs. His left hand steers, waving a glowing cigarette, while his right goes to the Philco radio and fumbles for the Reds, years before the cleanliness of FM.

The play-by-play drifts in and out, loud and soft, in harsh rhythm. My father breaks in to ask if I remembered the flashlight, the white cotton sack, the gig. All are there. The gig is nailed onto a cane pole. The sack is folded, but the stains are visible from the haul we made the previous August, before school kept us out of the ponds until another spring. The black planks of the truck bed are rotting,

and I worry that the tools of the frog-hunting foray might drop through to the pavement below. A flashlight rests in the seat between us.

The Cincinnati team trails, and after a Wiedemann commercial, they're gone, victims to squealing AM scramble. Summer pond sounds take over. And the whipping of weeds against our truck. We park well out of frog sight. My father reaches in the back for the sack and gig, and I grab the light. It is my duty to carry it, to blind frogs, keep them still.

There is nothing more. No Winchester bolt-action twenty-two. No hollow-point bullets. My father says they take the sport out. I fail to argue. I remember my trembling steps through cold, dark ponds groping for



floating, bleeding frogs and thank God for the gig.

I wonder how many friends of mine have circled strange ponds for hours on summer nights blinding amphibians. The gigging was left to my father, always. He called me the light man. Many times I let him down. My light would drift out across the pond, or toward owls in trees, while I watched him handle the gig in Olympic form, planting his left foot, rocking slowly backward on his right, and pinning the green target, more often than not, against the weeds and mud bank while I dodged Johnson Grass. This javelin thrower in coveralls aimed not at the horizon but at a pair of eyes in a dimly lit patch of weeds.

The summer of 1968 was the last time we hunted frogs. It was the year of My Lai, the killings of King and Kennedy, and an escalation of the troop count in Southeast Asia to 525,000 by Lyndon Johnson. At home, Harold Dobson stepped out from behind the meat counter at his store across from Tusculum College with a shotgun. He'd watched a band of students from New Jersey hoist the flag of North Vietnam up the college's flagpole. He and his shotgun said haul it down.

Still we hunted frogs. All summer. More than we ever had before, powered by a sense of urgency we would never stop to analyze. By midnight, the white flour sack would bulge and jump, and we would drive home, my father always choosing a different route. On our last trip, he took his time, circling through Orebank, Bright Hope, Pate's Hill.

"See those woods there? That's where my old collie got bit by a copperhead. Over there's the old home place. One time the roof caught on fire and mammy climbed up there and put it out with buckets of milk. Then she couldn't get back down."

My father had never told me that story before. I suppose he was never ready to admit, until the summer of 1968, that while his mother was on the roof saving the house, his father remained in his rocker reading the Bible.

"You know what a sharecropper is?"

"I've heard the word. I think we had it last year in Social Studies. Is it poor people?"

"It's people who farm for other folks. They live on their land for free and get some of the food they raise back. I always thought dad had twelve kids because he needed people to work, so he could read his Bible and teach shape-note school."

We round a curve on the Warrensburg Road and take a right toward Pine Grove Church. "I've heard dad sing many a time with his three brothers, here and over at Whittenburg."

"Who taught him?"

"Nobody that I know of. It was just in him. Any time the Saucemans got together, there was always music, and we'd most always win the singing contest, especially at the ice cream suppers. Dad would pick up a guitar and frail on it a lot, and your cousin Barney, he was as fine a drop-thumb banjo picker as I ever come across."

We pull away from the old brick church, back onto the deserted, curving road toward town, and we stop talking of country things.

Once home, in our floodlit backyard, my father reaches into the bag, grabs a wriggling frog, and whacks its head against a strip of concrete that used to border an old driveway, now grown over with grass, close to the maple tree I use for a golf course flagstick.

"You've got to addle them," he says. Then he takes his yellow Case XX pocket-knife and slices off the legs and feet. With a



pair of pliers, he peels the skin off the legs and places them in a pan of water. The ritual is repeated until the bloody bag is limp.

The next day, my mother salts, flours, and fries our catch, but she never joins us in the feast. The coating on each pair of legs is thin and crisp, the meat as white as cotton. We eat nothing else that meal. No bread, no vegetables. We strip the legs clean of meat and browned flour, and we tell about the night before, but not all. We hold back. We say nothing about sharecropping. We leave out talk of songs.

It was our last summer to hunt. By 1969 the world had changed. My father was working nights. I was a teenager.

My visits to the southern section of Greene County, Tennessee, from then on were never nocturnal. I came for Decoration Day in May. For too many funerals. Not enough reunions. Never more in a pickup. Always in the protected convenience of an air-conditioned coupe, soundless, comfortable, clean, and forever removed from Bright Hope. ♦

Fred Sauceman is the editor of *Now & Then* and the author of *The Place Setting: Timeless Tastes of the Mountain South, from Bright Hope to Frog Level*, a two-volume collection of writings about the foodways of Southern Appalachia.

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## Western Wind

By STEVE RHODES

Clouds pour over ironweed and hickories—  
swaddle in from Lexington, Pikeville,  
and Elizabethtown—upside-down cloths  
from the west-headed next for Clio,  
Left Hand, and Reedy. Slash pines bend,  
catkins fly, like a young girl's hair, undone.

You are there, inhabiting, *ruah*  
over everything, breath written not just on limbs  
full of leaves but wound in each geode,  
layered sandstone, spin sub-atomic particles  
in mysterious circles, turning unseen, west  
to east. My own chest: Out. In.

Whatever blows from the Cumberlands  
each day, you say something like, "Beloved."  
Something like, "Here, this place. Wet your finger."

Before taking up writing full-time, Stephen Rhodes served as a Presbyterian pastor and as the co-director of the Appalachian Ministries Educational Resource Center. His poetry has appeared or is forthcoming in *Shenandoah*, *Tar River Poetry*, *The William and Mary Review*, and *The Connecticut Review*, among others. He lives on a farm in south central Kentucky.



# THE WILDFLOWER WOMAN OF SCOTT COUNTY, VIRGINIA

*By Melissa Shipley*



Those of us growing up in the age of fast food and luxury dining have never known the hunger of someone who can't afford the most minimal of groceries. If all the stores closed tomorrow, never to open again, it would be a pity how many would go hungry or starve without realizing they have a buffet growing in their own backyards. Even the most commonly seen yard plants can be eaten or maybe even feed an entire family. As I walked across the yard of ninety-one-year-old Minnie Curtis of Hiltons, Virginia, I had no idea how much I would learn before I left.

When she was young, Minnie and her family moved fourteen times throughout southwest Virginia to be close to her father's latest road-building jobs. While Minnie's mother was minding the post office in Rus-

sell County, Minnie went to the woods with an older friend, Sally Mead, and they picked wildflowers. That was the start of Minnie's reputation as one of the most knowledgeable wildflower experts on Clinch Mountain.

While washing and cooking the flowers Minnie had picked, her mother set many to the side because she wasn't sure if they all could be eaten. It wasn't until years later that her mother admitted she had set them aside because she was afraid they might poison the family. Minnie insisted, however, that it would have been all right because she didn't pick anything that "Aunt Sally" hadn't chosen herself.

Whether it was learning from friends or family, or from the many books she would eventually read, Minnie became very knowledgeable about flowers, mushrooms, and other plants that could be used in the kitch-

*Minnie Curtis. Photo courtesy Fred Sauceman.*



en. She found out that if you ate sourgrass you wouldn't die of thirst. She discovered that rosehips were sources of Vitamin C. She discovered that early settlers used partridge berries because they were chocked full of necessary vitamins.

Another friend, Ruth, taught Minnie about edible mushrooms, and she started cooking puffballs and morels. Morels are known as "dry land fish" in southwest Virginia. Minnie dips them in cornmeal and fries them.

She has studied the medicinal use of plants as well. For example, she treats poison ivy with jewelweed, rubbing the juices on the skin touched by the plant or preparing a tea and freezing it in ice trays so the cubes can be rubbed on the itchy spots.

I visited her home at the foot of Clinch Mountain on a hot, dry day, and even though the long drought of 2007 had caused many plants to wither away, Minnie still found nourishment coming from the arid ground. Sourgrass made my mouth water. Sheep sorrel was bitterly good.

Minnie served me a reminder of the previous spring, a jelly made from the red bud tree in her yard. Spread over a freshly baked biscuit, it was the best jelly I have ever eaten.

Little did I know, one of the secrets of the hills around me was in the virtual buffet of colorful foods that provide not only taste and sustenance but also the benefits of enriching vitamins and minerals. I hope to some day make a spring salad and some red bud jelly myself. ❖

## Minnie Curtis's Spring Salad

### Salad Ingredients

1/2 head lettuce (to help dilute the "wild" taste)  
1/2 medium onion  
3 bunches wild field cress or watercress  
6 violet leaves (or red bud, rose, or other flowers)  
6 trout lily leaves  
2 bunches wood sorrel  
2 bunches sheep sorrel

### Dressing ingredients:

2 tablespoons oil  
1 1/2 tablespoons vinegar  
1 1/2 teaspoons sugar  
1 teaspoon salt

Heat to boiling and pour over salad.

Decorate the salad with violets or other flower edibles, such as nasturtiums, calendula, red bud, or rose petals. The salad can be served with boiled eggs, ham, and cheese.

## Red Bud Jelly

Place 2 cups rinsed red bud flowers in a jar and barely cover with about 2 cups boiling water. Cover and let stand for 24 hours. Strain and discard the blossoms.

To 2 cups of the extract, add 2 tablespoons lemon juice and 3 tablespoons Sure-Jell. Bring to a boil, then add 2 cups sugar and boil hard for about 1 minute. Pour into hot jelly glasses and seal with paraffin.

Melissa Shipley is a student in the master of arts in teaching program at East Tennessee State University. Thanks to Jill Sauceman for introducing *Now & Then* to Minnie Curtis.



# Harmony with Nature

By RON HOUCHIN

There's a hole in the window  
cicadas drive through. The walls  
hang like laundry.

My hair is under the eaves  
in starling nests.  
Each storm, my fingers tattoo  
wood siding.

Evergreen winds knock pinecones  
from my knuckles  
like gemstones from a ring.

Breathing in the rhythm of crickets,  
moonlight bounces off my back.  
I surf each sycamore leaf  
to the ground  
and tumble down the riverbank  
with walnuts.  
I shine in the yard like raindrops.

My face is as indifferent as a cloud.  
I hang out on twig ends  
of cottonwood, ready to float  
off like sound.

I am milk-drunk with  
the newborn mouse in the attic.  
Everything comes in. I never go out.

Ron Houchin was a public school teacher. His work has appeared in or is forthcoming in *The New Orleans Review*, *The Potomac Review*, *Appalachian Heritage*, *Cooweescoowee*, *Kestrel*, *Poetry Northwest*, and others. His book, *Among Wordless Things* (Wind Publications, 2004), was the Appalachian Writers Association Book of the Year in poetry for 2005.



## WILDNESS



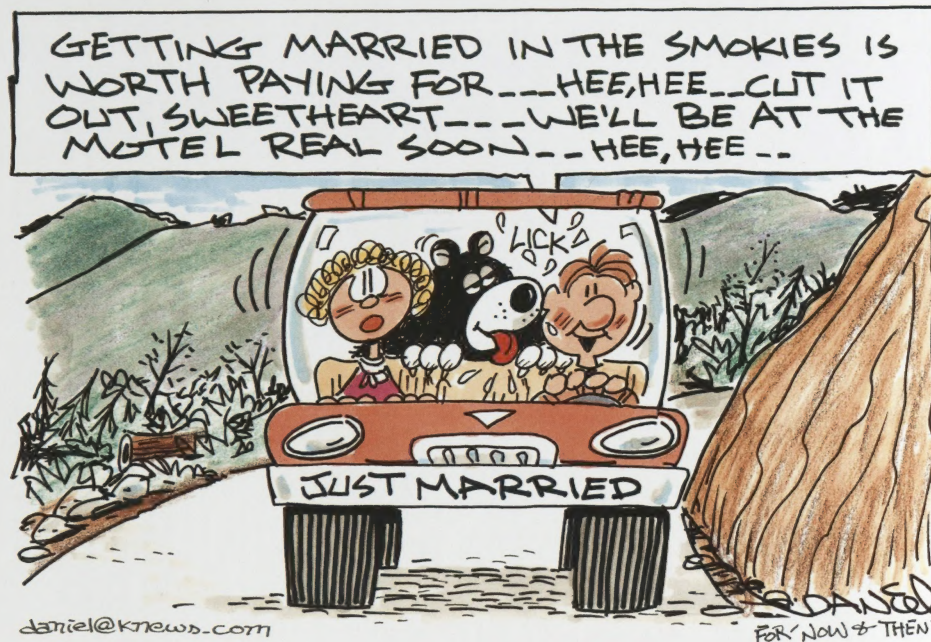
One of the best things about working in a place as diverse as the Center for Appalachian Studies and Services is the surprise each day can bring. A few months ago, a friend from the center's Bluegrass, Old Time, and Country Music program, Jessica Ball, dropped by to say hello.

In the course of conversation, we showed her the latest issue of *Now & Then*. "You know," she said, "my dad has had photographs on two covers of the magazine." (See *Now & Then* Volume 11, Number 3 and Volume 18, Number 1.)

We thought this Randy Ball photograph a particularly fine way to lead us out of the wildness of this issue.

*Photo courtesy Randy Ball.*





Charles Daniel's cartoon dovetails perfectly with Sarah Thomas' article "Ursus Americanus: Adapting to a World Less Wild" (see page 45 of this issue).

Cartoon courtesy Charles Daniel, Knoxville News-Sentinel.

# NOW & THEN

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